

Chapter One: Bravery:

Ginny Weasley stood just in the doors leading to the courtyard at Hogwarts, gazing forward and sighing. The previous night had seen the champions drawn for the Triwizard Tournament. The first three champions had been drawn, nothing too spectacular, but then the drawing of a mysterious, fourth champion. A champion who Ginny was almost certain was thrown into the heat of battle against his will, even if everyone else thought that he willingly found a way to trick the Goblet of Fire. The fourth champion was Harry Potter, the person that Ginny was gazing at right now, trying to drum up the courage to talk to. Harry did not know she was there, he seemed to be submerged in his own frustration and for good reason.

There was no reason to deny it, that at one point, Ginny had a crush on the Boy-Who-Lived. That crush disappeared sometime after Harry had saved her in the Chamber of Secrets. She liked him no less, but she found her affections pointed towards the boy, as opposed to the legend. It was not fair what Harry had to endure, each and every year for the past three years and now being thrown into the Triwizard Tournament, Ginny would have been on the verge of a nervous breakdown if she was in Harry's shoes. Yet, somehow, he managed to hold his sanity together, something that Ginny admired greatly.

Her morning had not been great. It had been filled with people praising Harry for finding a way to trick the Goblet and people saying that Harry tricked the Goblet because he was a glory hog. Ginny just barely resisted hexing both sides. Add to that the row she had with Hermione, with Hermione siding with Ron over the issue with Harry and Ginny wondered if the entire school had simultaneously lost their minds at the same time.

"Just talk to him, Weasley, he won't bite," muttered Ginny to herself as she took a couple of steps away from the doorway she was standing, right towards Harry. "I mean, he's always been nice to you, well, he's been nice to everyone that isn't a foul git like Malfoy or Snape, but still, don't be afraid, he's not going to make fun of you no matter what."

Ginny somehow managed to will her legs to take steps forward. She was sorted into Gryffindor for a reason, even though the hat previously considered Slytherin much to her utter horror. Not because she saw the world in black and white, good and evil, Gryffindor and Slytherin, like some people did, but because she was afraid what her family would think. Mostly her mother and given her reaction where she screamed at Ginny for hours about the diary incident, Ginny felt well justified in her fears. Still, there was a time to prove why the Sorting Hat did in fact settle on Gryffindor. Harry needed someone to stand by him and she needed to get over her shyness. Ginny had to be Harry's friend and maybe more if she was lucky enough.

Harry sat under a tree at the edge of the lake, deep in thought. How could he have been put in this tournament to in the first place? He never was even near the Goblet and now Ron thought he was an attention seeking egomaniac. The rest of the school cast him either dark or appraising looks. He had not even wanted to face Hermione, as she looked away from him quickly, as if she was disappointed. He knew he could not stay out here forever, no matter how tempting it was to avoid the rest of the world.

"Harry?" prompted Ginny, throwing all caution to the wind, forcing herself to look Harry straight in the eyes when she talked to him, noticing how beautiful they were. She wished Harry would not hide them under those ugly glasses and Harry looked at her. "Uh, hi."

"Hi, Ginny," said Harry in a tired voice, showing that he did not sleep all night. "How's your year been?"

"Find, I guess," said Ginny, which was true, other than this entire mess with the Goblet of Fire and the fear that Harry could be in serious danger.

"I suppose you want to know how I did it," replied Harry, abruptly cutting off the small talk portion of the conversation.

"No, Harry, I don't think you did it," said Ginny quickly, but Harry appeared to not hear her at first.

“Look, as I’ve told everyone that...wait, you don’t think I do it,” said Harry trailing off, as he looked at Ginny, not believing what he just heard.

“Yes, Harry I don’t believe you put your name in the Goblet and anyone who actually knows you should think the same,” said Ginny firmly, as she sat herself down next to Harry. “Look, Harry, the look on your face when Dumbledore announced your name, the fact that you utterly seem annoyed every time someone looks at your scar, you have when anyone brings up your fame, I can see it Harry, I believe you!”

Harry looked at Ginny, as she flipped her vibrant red hair out of her face. This was the most she had ever said to him, without blushing madly and trying to find the nearest exit, out of embarrassment. To be honest, Harry wondered if he had befriended the wrong Weasley, at least Ginny had a reasonable head on her shoulders and not like Ron, who jumped to conclusions without thinking. He looked at her face, which gave a look of encouragement towards him, that she believed in him.

“Thanks Ginny, that means a lot to me,” said Harry with a slight, smile on his face. “I don’t think too many other people will believe me, do they?”

“The thing is Harry, I don’t think so, not from what I’ve seen at least,” replied Ginny, gaining more confidence with each word she was able to speak to Harry, even if that smile he gave her made her heart jump. “There are two groups, those who hate you because they think you tricked the Goblet and those who worship you because you tricked the Goblet.”

“Hermione, I got the impression that she was annoyed at me, I was going to talk to her but decided against it,” said Harry and he saw the look of anger in Ginny’s eyes when he brought up Hermione.

“She’s with my insensitive prat of a brother on this issue, she said that while she doesn’t think you are capable of tricking the Goblet, she wonders if you might have asked another student to do it for

you,” stated Ginny in an angry tone of voice. “She should really know you better!”

“Yes, she should,” said Harry, closing his eyes, he was deeply hurt by the fact that his two best friends and in fact, his first friends his own age, had seemed to think that he had willingly entered the Triwizard Tournament. “I’m going to have to compete, no matter what.”

“Surely Dumbledore could have done something to get you out of the Tournament,” said Ginny.

“No, it’s a magically binding contract, it can’t be helped,” sighed Harry.

“That’s right, he only steps in to help after you risk your neck,” muttered Ginny to herself, causing Harry to look at her strangely. Ginny had never forgiven Dumbledore for what happened her first year at Hogwarts. She felt that if Dumbledore was half as great as people said he was, he would have been able to figure out that there was a basilisk in the school and that Ginny was being possessed. But, he did nothing, with Harry having to save her from Riddle’s possession and defeat the basilisk. Seeing that Harry was staring at her, Ginny cleared her throat. “I know you didn’t put yourself in but for what it’s worth, I think you really do have a chance of winning the tournament if you work hard. But, that’s not important to me, the important thing is getting you out of this alive.”

“Ginny, I know you want to be supportive, but I don’t think I’ll have much of a chance in the tournament, I can barely get through my regular classes without Hermione’s help,” said Harry hopelessly.

“Harry, it’s not a good idea to think so little of yourself,” said Ginny, as she began to realize the influence that both Ron and Hermione was having on Harry was not good. Ron had pushed Harry into slacking and Hermione had made Harry feel inferior with her intelligence, so he did not push himself to do as well as he should have. “You made a Patronus in your third year, not many people, even Dumbledore, could have done that.”

“You knew about that?” asked Harry.

“Of course, Ron doesn’t know when to keep his big mouth shut,” said Ginny with a smile, that made Harry feel a bit better. “Harry, if anyone could live up to the hype that has been forced upon them, it’s you. It’s not because of what you are, but who you are. I don’t care much for Harry Potter, the Boy-Who-Lived, anymore, I care a great deal about Harry Potter, my friend.”

Ginny stopped short. She had gone too far, assuming that her and Harry would be friends. She wondered if Harry even wanted friends after what Ron and Hermione did to him.

“We are friends, right Harry?” asked Ginny, who really did not have that many friends, other than Luna.

“We should have been sooner,” said Harry and for some reason, Ginny’s face lighting up had caused Harry a great deal of happiness. She was truly a ray of sunshine on the stormy last day. “I’m sorry.”

“Sorry, for what?” asked Ginny in confusion.

“I should have been for you after what happened, with the Chamber,” said Harry. “Ron told me would be fine, but still, if it was me in your situation, I wouldn’t have been.”

“Harry, don’t apologize, you had to fight a basilisk and the sixteen year old version of V-v-Voldemort,” said Ginny, releasing the name with a breath, knowing how Harry looked disappointed when people had called him You-Know-Who. “You had your own trauma.”

“We could have helped each other, though,” replied Harry.

“What’s done is done, Harry,” said Ginny dismissively, wondering why Harry felt that everything bad that happened was his own personal problem. He was not the one that forced her to write in Riddle’s diary. That was her foolish mistake. “The most important thing is the Tournament, considering you’re forced to be in it anyway.”

“Right, Ginny...do you think someone might have entered my name into the Goblet to...kill me?” asked Harry, it did make him sound as paranoid as Moody.

“Harry, I wish that wasn’t the case, but it looks to be the case,” said Ginny. “No one knows what the First Task is going to be, but it doesn’t mean you can’t prepare for anything. You know, learn a few spells, some one’s that are a bit dangerous to be on the receiving end of. Make that person think twice about putting your name in the Goblet.”

“So what do you think we should do?” asked Harry who was at a loss at where to go from here.

“Head to the library and see what we can find,” replied Ginny and she saw the alarmed look on Harry’s face. “Don’t worry, we can have some fun with this too, learning magic doesn’t have to be mindless studying.”

“Right, so we can get going then,” said Harry, as the two walked towards the school. Harry wished he had cornered Ginny and talked to her sooner, she was really a great person and he was confident that she would be a great friend. The way her face lit up when she talked to Harry really made him feel wonderful. She encouraged him, rather than nagged him like Hermione did, that made him feel like he could do more, he could do better.

Plus he would have to be blind not to notice how pretty she was becoming. Harry thought about the girl that he had thought of as just his best friend’s little sister up until just a couple of hours ago. She was her own person and Harry was fully confident that Ginny would not abandon him when he needed her, like Ron and Hermione did when they thought he entered his name in the Goblet of Fire.

Chapter Two: Intervention:

Ginny sat in the Common Room, Harry had already gone upstairs to go to sleep. She had spent all day with Harry, trying to figure out what might be a help to him not only in the Triwizard Tournament but the next time someone made an attempt on his life. As much as she hated the fact that Harry could be in danger, it was an all too harsh reality. At least he would be taking steps to be offensive, as opposed to defensive. After their brief trip to the library, they spent all day outside, alternating between looking up spells and just talking, getting to know each other.

Ginny noticed one thing. While Harry was open about his time at Hogwarts, most of which she knew thanks to Ron's big mouth, he was very evasive when she tried to talk his life before. Fred and George had said there were bars on Harry's windows when they rescued him before her first year and at first, Ginny thought her brothers were spinning a tail. Now, she was not too sure they were lying and wondered what else would be going on at that house. Ginny hoped to find out, but also realized that Harry would tell her in due time, once she completely gained his trust. After the incident with the Goblet, she could tell that Harry might not be too trustful with completely personal matters to anyone. Still, if Harry opened up, Ginny vowed to find the time to listen to him.

"There, you are Ginny, I've been looking all over for you, I thought you needed help looking over your Potions Essay!" shouted Hermione, as she turned to Ginny. "You shouldn't hold it off to the last minute."

"I didn't, Hermione," replied Ginny with a sigh, trying not to lose her temper at the older girl after what she did. "Harry helped me with it."

"Ginny, I don't know what you were thinking! Harry's not all that smart at all, especially with Potions!" cried Hermione in a horrified voice, as she dove towards Ginny's bag, rifling through it for the essay in question. Ginny let Hermione do it, wanting the girl to eat her words, even though it was tempting to hex her at the slight she made towards Harry. After a moment, Hermione found what she was looking for and removed the Essay. Looking over it, Hermione read

the essay, eyebrows raised as she looked over it. "Ginny, if you didn't need any help, all you had to do was say something. This is actually good, not perfect, but pretty good."

"Well, Harry did help me with it," said Ginny with a sigh, which was a slight fabrication of the truth. In truth, she had talked with Harry about the Potions Essay and after prodding him a bit, he actually came to a couple of insightful conclusions that she did not even think of it. It began to add validity to her theory that Harry knew more than he let on but he held back. "I hope he does apply himself more, he has a chance to be one of the top students in the school, maybe have even higher marks than you."

Hermione had a bit of sour expression on her face, as she looked at Ginny and Ginny knew she had hit a soft spot in Hermione's ego.

"So, that's were you were, with Harry, all day," said Hermione casually, almost in the same air of discussing the weather.

"Not that it's any of your business, but yes, I was, I think he needed someone to be with him after everyone in the school thinking he placed his name in the Goblet," said Ginny as she looked at Hermione. "Or have you forgotten our little discussion this morning?"

"I remember and I think it might be a good idea if we all steer clear of Harry, I've noticed something has been off with him all year, since last year in fact since he was going to kill S...someone without even hearing them out," said Hermione and Ginny stood there, arms folded across her chest, not blinking. "Another disturbing thing, I found this out when I researched about the Imperius Curse, looking about hints about how something fought them, I learned something disturbing."

"Look, Granger," stated Ginny, using Hermione's surname to add emphasis on how upset she was with the girl. "I don't know what you've read, but it's not going to change my mind about Harry. If you don't want to be there for him, fine, I'm beginning to think he might be better off without you anyway, but quite frankly that's your problem and Ron's problem, not mine, when he never forgives you for what you're doing."

“Ginny, listen to me, the Imperius Curse, Harry was able to throw it off too easily, it’s supposed to take several times, weeks, maybe even months before someone could fight its effects, but he was very nearly able to do it completely on the first time” argued Hermione and once again, Ginny failed to see where Hermione was going. In fact, she was happy that Harry would be able to fight the effects of that dreadful curse, that way he could not be manipulated into doing horrible things. “To throw off the curse that quickly, someone has to have a real affinity for the dark arts. It would have been easy to trick the Goblet.”

“That doesn’t mean anything to me Hermione and if you really were Harry’s friend it should not mean anything to you as well,” said Ginny, as she held her wand, hand shaking slightly, looking at Hermione, who took a step back at the angry glare that Ginny was giving her. “You’re just like the rest of these people, jumping to conclusions based on everything else and not Harry. Just because Harry’s a parselmouth, just because he can throw off the Imperius Curse, doesn’t mean anything. You were the last person that I thought would even think of turning against Harry.”

“Oh, and I suppose you know more about Harry than I do,” challenged Hermione sarcastically.

“No, but I want to get to know him and won’t jump to conclusions about him when I do,” said Ginny in a calm deadly voice, as she looked at Hermione, hands shaking slightly. “Now, I’m going to bed, don’t you dare ever talk about Harry like that ever again!”

Ginny stormed upstairs in a bad mood, leaving Hermione standing there in a huff. At least Ron’s actions could be put down to just pure jealousy. No matter how petty it was, at least Ginny sort of expected that type of behavior from her brother. From Hermione, she expected better. Making her way to the third year girl’s dormitory, Ginny debated on whether or not she would tell Harry about what Hermione said. Resolving to think about it after a good night’s sleep, Ginny laid down, drifting off to bed, thinking about her day with Harry and wishing she would have summoned up the courage to talk to him sooner.

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Harry made his way downstairs for Breakfast, a bit too late to be honest. It was a good thing that he spent most of the previous day away from the mutterings of the school, because when he came down to eat, he heard mutterings. No matter whether he was liked or hated for what they believed, the fact remained that almost everyone in the school still believed that he could have put his name in the Goblet of Fire. Didn't they know he had more than enough trouble in his life? He did not need this tournament. For once, he looked forward to not being the center of attention. In his mind, Harry mentally searched for a way out. Something that Bagman said about Crouch knowing the rulebook back to front had come to his mind. Harry would have loved to see that rulebook, maybe there was something that could get Harry out. He would have to ask Dumbledore when he could, as one of the judges, surely he would have had a copy of the rules on hand. Spotting Ginny and careful not to lock eyes with either Ron or Hermione, he moved over to join her on the other end of the table, seeing her bright smile as he said down next to her.

"Morning Ginny," yawned Harry as he sat down next to her and began to pile food onto his plate, blocking out the yells of other people at the Gryffindor table to sit next to them, out of being impressed that Harry had somehow gotten around the Goblet of Fire.

"Good morning Harry," said Ginny brightly, trying not to let her anger at Hermione after the events of last night ruin Harry's morning, and she spotted Ron glaring at her for talking to Harry but she swiftly ignored him. "Do you think we can get to practicing some of those spells that we found after dinner tonight?"

"Yeah, that'd be great Ginny," answered Harry, as he looked forward to see how well they worked.

"The thing is, I don't know if there would be any place that we could go that we won't get bothered by someone," said Ginny with a frown.

"Leave it to me, I have something that will definitely help us find somewhere that we can be alone in peace," said Harry quietly, so no

one could hear them. Harry could easily see Ron jumping to the wrong conclusion if his sister was going somewhere alone with a boy, especially if that boy was him. Not that he was sure the value of what Ron thought was worth two knuts anymore, but for the moment, Harry wanted to avoid a scene.

“Oh, okay,” said Ginny as she sighed. “I better get ready for Potions.”

“Snape first thing in the morning on Monday,” muttered Harry, he could think of few things that would be worse, as he looked at Ginny with a sympathetic look in his eyes. “I’ll see you later today.”

“See you later Harry,” replied Ginny, as Harry sat at the table, having a quick breakfast, knowing that he should have gotten up earlier but he put the matter off to avoid facing the rest of the school. He made his way to his own classes, avoiding making eye contact with anyone. As bad enough as it was to be hated, it seemed just slightly worse to be praised for something that he did not do.

“Well, gentlemen it’s the champion,” drawled the voice of Draco Malfoy, as he walked forward with Crabbe and Goyle, right in front of Harry’s path. Crabbe and Goyle cracked their knuckles. “Better line up and get his autograph now, I daresay it could be worth some gold in a few weeks. After all, a lot of the champions have died and Potter, let’s face it, you have no chance to survive the tournament.”

Crabbe and Goyle gave loud, moronic laughter. Malfoy stood there, smug expression on his face. At least Harry knew what he could expect from those three and welcomed the familiarity, no matter how bad it was. Still, he was not going to let Malfoy and his goon squad walk all over him.

“Look Malfoy, it’s Professor Moody,” said Harry and Draco turned around, nearly falling over himself, the ferret incident fresh in his mind, as Harry smirked at Malfoy’s irritation, before walking away from the Slytherins, careful not to turn his back on the Slytherin until he was completely out of range and headed outside for the morning’s classes.

The classes that Harry had in the morning were pretty uneventful. At least uneventful compared to the last couple of days. He sat next to Neville instead of Ron and Hermione in Herbology and actually found that he concentrated on his work a bit better when he did not have to deal with the constant bickering of his two estranged friends. In fact, the couple of occasions that he could not avoid looking their way, they seemed to be arguing about something.

Care of Magical Creatures as an adventure, as Hagrid still had them studying the Blast-Ended Skrewts. Harry wondered exactly how much they could learn about something that he could honestly not see any use for. Unless that use was causing students to wince as they were too close when the Skrewts blasted off. Still once again, Harry found himself able to concentrate much better in class.

Divination was more of the same. Trelawney predicted his death, again. Harry yawned, before making a comment to the affect that, "well, we all have to go sometime". Trelawney seemed scandalized that Harry did not take her predictions seriously. Harry was beginning to wonder why he took Divination. The answer was obvious, he took it because Ron did and it was a light class. He would have been better off taking Arithmancy or Study of Ancient Runes.

Harry left Divination making his way to dinner. After a quick meal, he needed to get the Marauder's Map and maybe his Invisibility Cloak as well before practicing those spells. As he moved down one of the corridors that he employed as a shortcut, Harry saw something that shocked him.

He saw Cho Chang, who had been the object of many of his dreams since his third year, snogging someone. A second later, it took Harry's brain to register that someone was in fact his fellow Triwizard Champion, Cedric Diggory. Quickly, Harry stepped back into the corridor he came from. Truthfully his crush for Cho was based on the fact that he thought he was pretty and quite frankly, they only interacted briefly a few times. Still, be that as it may, that did not help Harry's mood, he felt crushed and even thought a small logical part of his mind thought this was unfair of him, a bit betrayed as well. His steps quickened, as he made his way down to dinner, an activity that

did not sound too pleasant at all giving the fact his stomach was turning at what he just saw.

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Ginny returned to Dinner, refreshed, mostly because her last class of the day was History of Magic and she pretty much slept for most of the hour. It was not a problem, she had read the book already for her year, she did not think that suffering through Binns's lectures would be the best thing. Quickly, she made her way and saw Harry walking forward, looking rather preoccupied of something.

"Harry?" asked Ginny as she looked at Harry, who was on the verge of being ill. "Harry?"

"Hello Ginny," said Harry robotically as he sat down, with Ginny joining him. Ginny looked at Harry with a concerned expression on her face.

"Are you feeling alright?" asked Ginny after about five minutes of watching Harry pick at this food, before he took a few bites, which appeared to be just a way to distract himself from something.

"Fine," said Harry as he continued to half eat. Ginny just sat, letting the matter drop, at least for now, but she could see that Harry was upset about something, which caused her to slightly lose her appetite.

"Are you still up for practicing those spells tonight?" asked Ginny, as Harry looked into her brown eyes, which was a mistake, Harry could not bring himself to lie to her but somehow he had to.

"Yeah, ready to go," said Harry in an absent minded tone of voice as they made their way up. "Let's just get something from my trunk first and then we'll be off."

After Harry had gotten both the Invisibility Cloak and the Marauder's Map, he draped the Cloak over both himself and Ginny. Ginny had heard Ron mention the Cloak, but she had never seen anything so good before.

“Harry, this is a really useful thing to have,” said Ginny in an excited voice, trying to lighten Harry’s mood. “Actually I have an idea, you should use this thing to get to your classes, that way you won’t have to put up with people gawking at you everywhere you turn.”

Harry stopped, his bad mood forgotten, as he looked. He wondered why he did not think of it before.

“You’re brilliant Ginny,” praised Harry and Ginny averted her face lightly, to hide a slight blush that she had when Harry had called her brilliant. She did not need to regress back to her former state. Taking a few seconds to regain her composure, she looked at Harry. “Right, no one would bother me and I can just take off the cloak and put it in my bag, I should have thought of it sooner.”

Ginny did not say anything, but she did wonder why Hermione failed to come to that conclusion, before passing it on to Harry. She was supposed to be so smart, so why did she not come to the same conclusion that Ginny did when she first saw the cloak.

Then again, Hermione fancied Ron, so she could not be all too bright.

“Right, this looks like the perfect place,” said Harry, consulting the map once again, seeing an empty and mostly unused classroom that looked pretty spacious and good enough to practice spells. Filch seemed to be several floors down and Peeves appeared to be out of the way as well. All of the teachers were securely in their offices, as Harry pushed open the class room.

“Let’s try that modified Confundus Charm first, that should keep any uninvited guests out,” said Ginny and Harry was pleased that they were on about the same wave length, as they placed the spell on the door, before Harry sank down on the chair.

“Give me a minute to catch myself Ginny,” stated Harry as Ginny sat down right next to him.

“I don’t want to pry, but you do look a bit peekish, Harry,” said Ginny. “Are you sure you don’t need to go to the hospital wing? We don’t have to practice these spells today if you’re not feeling up to it.”

"Physically, I'm feeling fine," said Harry and Ginny looked at Harry, very skeptical. He had a strange view of what was fine. The truth was, he did always look a bit undersized and that concerned Ginny, giving the dubious conclusions she was beginning to form about the Dursleys. Underage witches and wizards required a lot of food, because developing magic burned through a lot of energy. That was one of the reasons why her mother cooked so much for them and why Hogwarts served such larger meals. She noticed that Harry had gone many times without eating, something that seemed second nature for him, almost as if he was used to it.

"Physically you're fine, Harry?" asked Ginny, waiting for confirmation.

"Physically yes, but emotionally I'm a wreck," said Harry and Ginny nodded in understanding. "I don't know if I should be burdening you with this but...I fancied Cho Chang."

"I've noticed," replied Ginny, unable to keep just a tiny bit of bitterness out of her voice. The truth was that Cho was the absolutely wrong girl for Harry, for a variety of reasons other than Ginny's own feelings for him. But then Ginny noticed the past tense in Harry's voice, and gave him an encouraging look to continue.

"Well, I do but then I accidentally walked in on her and Diggory," said Harry. "They didn't notice I was there, but still, I saw them...well you know..."

"Snogging," offered Ginny helpfully and Harry nodded, looking like someone shot his puppy. "Harry, this thing you have for Cho well...you know I'm saying this as your friend, right?"

"What are you saying?" asked Harry in confusion before adding. "And yes, I do."

"Cho's really not someone who would be good for you right now," said Ginny slowly, trying to let Harry down gently, not to break his heart, because breaking Harry's heart would break her own heart. "She's high maintenance and requires a lot of attention, someone who will put her own needs ahead of their own. Diggory's not the first

boy she's been with. Chang tends to be the type to go through boys about as fast as some girls go through shoes."

Harry leaned back in his chair, wondering if he dodged a bullet. He had heard his Aunt Petunia gossip about the type of girls that Ginny had described Cho as. None of the names she called them were too flattering and Harry tried to go over what he really knew about Cho. He could not really recall anything personal that he knew about the Ravenclaw girl, other than she was the Seeker for the house team and a year above him. Basically common knowledge stuff information.

"Harry are you there?" asked Ginny gently. "I know you're upset, I know I would be too if I was in your place, but it's better off if you let this go."

"Ginny, you're right, how could I be so stupid?" asked Harry.

"You're a teenager, Harry, you're not really supposed to make smart decisions about everything," said Ginny, before they both broke out into laughter but Harry then stopped.

"Yes, I don't suppose that she would have ever liked me anyway," said Harry in a dismissive voice. "How could anyone like a scrawny midget in glasses like me?"

"Now, I won't have anyone talking bad about my friend like that," replied Ginny with a stern glare as she looked at Harry, but she could not keep her mouth shut any longer. "You do look a bit underweight, it's almost like those Muggles you live with don't feed you."

"They do, it's just not much," muttered Harry, almost embarrassed like it was his fault. "I mean, I always get food, it's not like they starve me, it's enough to survive on."

"Harry, developing wizards should eat three large meals a day!" shouted Ginny, causing Harry to wince, before she grabbed his hand in a comforting matter, ashamed at alarming Harry with her sudden outburst. "Why do you think Mum cooks so much? Your magic could be seriously stunted, you could get ill from not having enough energy

to burn from not eating enough, for Merlin's sake you could have died before you even went to Hogwarts!"

Harry frowned, but Ginny did have a point. He did notice that he was fatigued several times after doing particularly large bits of magic. For someone who had the power to beat Voldemort when he was one, he was underpowered. He should have been capable of doing even better feats of magic.

"Ginny, do you know of anyway I can get my body caught up to what it should be for my age?" asked Harry and Ginny's face brightened at Harry asking her for help.

"Actually, there are nutrient potions, but it's not a quick fix, it would take a couple of months before your body is where it should be and they're not too hard to brew, only taking a couple of hours to do so, in fact the Hospital Wing should have some on hand," said Ginny, once again at a loss to understand why Hermione had not thought of that. A part of Ginny wondered if Hermione had ever cared for Harry at all. "And Harry, please don't skive off on meals, you should be eating at least three times as much as Ron does, that might help you as well."

Ginny saw a brief pained look flicker off of Harry's face at the mention of Ron and felt immediately bad for bringing up her brother's name to Harry. Wisely, they let the matter pass.

"Right, I think we should get to practicing some of those spells right now," said Harry quickly.

"If you feel up to it Harry, then I'm more than ready," said Ginny, as she took out the wand, double checking the charms they put on the doors before they went to practice the spells they looked up.

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They got a good hour, hour and a half worth of practice learning various spells that were a bit more advanced than their current years before Harry nearly collapsed in exhaustion. That caused Ginny to make a call to stop for today. Quickly, Harry dropped into the chair.

“Just a few more seconds to catch my breath, I’ll be fine, when I start taking those potions that you told me about,” said Harry in a reassuring voice, as he moved to get the Invisibility Cloak and checked the Marauder’s Map. “Good Dumbledore’s in his office.”

“Why would you want to know where Dumbledore was?” asked Ginny.

“I’m going to ask him for a copy of the rules for the Triwizard Tournament, there might be something that he overlooked that might get me out,” said Harry and Ginny wisely bit her tongue. She had a feeling that if Dumbledore really wanted to, he could invalidate Harry’s entry into the Triwizard in a blink of an eye. Yet, Harry still greatly respected Dumbledore and Ginny was mentally working on a way to convince Harry that his trust in Dumbledore was misplaced.

“If you say so,” said Ginny and Harry frowned, seeing the uncertain look on Ginny’s face. Perhaps he was being paranoid, but he could have sworn that she did not care too much for Dumbledore. It was strange, everyone he had met, unless they were in Slytherin, had nothing but great things to say about the Headmaster, but he threw the cloak over himself and Ginny, as they made their way towards the stairs. Harry stopped in front of the gargoyle.

“Lemon Drop?” offered Harry tentatively, as he looked at the gargoyle that remained stubborn and immobile. Harry’s eyes averted down to the map, where the word “Cockroach Cluster” appeared. Of course, the map gave him the password to the one eyed witch, it could give him the password to any restricted area in the school. “Cockroach Cluster.”

“I better stay out here,” said Ginny, knowing full way that she’d say something they would both regret if she had to face Dumbledore. “Good luck Harry.”

“Thanks,” said Harry, stepping out from behind the cloak, leaving Ginny waiting underneath, as he walked into the office to face Dumbledore. Knocking on the door, Harry waited for an answer.

“Enter,” said Dumbledore’s voice and Harry stepped inside, with Dumbledore looking up, an excited look etched in his eyes. “Harry! Might I ask why I owe this late pleasure?”

“Hello, Professor, it’s about the incident with the Goblet of Fire,” said Harry.

“I know Harry, I regret it as much as the next person, but the fact remains, that unfortunate flaw with the Goblet of Fire will be corrected for the next tournament and it is rather sad that you would be the one to suffer the consequences of this unprecedented event,” said Dumbledore with a twinkle in his eye.

“Did you see anything suspicious, that might give a hint to who did this?” asked Harry hopefully.

“No sadly, the activity around the Goblet was not strictly monitored as much as it should have been,” said Dumbledore with a sigh. “Alastor is investigating the Goblet as we speak, to see any clues that would lead to tampering.”

“Professor, might it not have been a good idea to have a guard out there to watch the Goblet?” asked Harry and Dumbledore looked taken aback, as if he was astonished that Harry had come to this logical deduction.

“It might have been prudent, yes, I will make that recommendation for the next tournament,” said Dumbledore with a grandfatherly smile. “Is there anything else on your mind Harry?”

“I’d like to see a copy of the Triwizard Tournament rules please,” said Harry and Dumbledore just stared at Harry, before briefly assuming a casual expression.

“Harry, that cannot be done I’m afraid, and I understand your fear, but I’m afraid what is done is done, the Goblet has chosen you as the fourth champion and there is no way around it,” said Dumbledore firmly. “Now, it’s getting late, I would highly suggest getting some sleep.”

“Right, sir,” said Harry as he made his way out of the office, sensing the tone in Dumbledore’s voice, it left no room for argument as he left the office and Ginny lifted the cloak slightly, so Harry could see her as he exited, waiting for what Harry would tell her “He wouldn’t give me a copy of the rules.”

“Figures,” muttered Ginny under her breath, as Harry slipped underneath the cloak, with both of them making their way back to the Gryffindor Common Room. Harry was conflicted. A part of him just wanted to just do the minimal amount of work possible for the tasks, just enough to get by to justify the magical contract. Yet another more ambitious part of him wanted to train hard to actually win this tournament, to rub it into the faces of people like Malfoy that gave him no chance, along with whomever put his name in the Goblet. After they walked for a few minutes, taking a longer route than Harry would normally take, Ginny broke the silence. “Harry, there’s something we really need to talk about tomorrow morning. I’ve got a break first period, what you do you have?”

“History of Magic,” said Harry after a moment’s thought as they kept walking.

“Good, you can skip that, after Breakfast we can swing by the hospital wing to see about those potions and then we can head back to that unused classroom,” said Ginny and Harry looked unsure about skipping a class, even one that bored him to tears. “This is more important than nodding off to another one of Binns’ goblin rebellion lectures.”

“If you think it’s that important, I guess missing one class can’t hurt,” said Harry as they walked towards the portrait of the Fat Lady. “Balderdash.”

“If you say so,” yawned the portrait, not really paying attention to the fact that no one was really invisible. Harry consulted the map once again, the Gryffindor Common Room was completely empty and everyone appeared to be in their dormitories. They had spent more time outside tonight than they had thought. Harry quickly folded the map, as they took off the Invisibility Cloak.

“Good night then Harry,” said Ginny as she wrapped her arms around Harry with a hug. At first Harry was caught off guard, not knowing how to react, but he returned the gesture, realizing how much he liked to have Ginny close to him, as he pulled her in tight. It felt nice for some reason.

“Night Ginny,” said Harry as they mutually released each other, as both went to their respective dormitories.

Thanks to all of the people who reviewed the last chapter. I don't know if the updates will be this prompt all of the time, but I'm hoping to get one or two chapters done a week at least, maybe more if time permits. Next chapter, Harry comes to some painful realizations about Dumbledore's intentions towards him and much more.

Chapter Three: Intentions

The next morning, Harry made sure to get up early so he had plenty of time to eat breakfast with Ginny. After eating just a little bit more than Harry could stomach, the two made their way up towards the Hospital Wing, managing to put on the Invisibility Cloak to avoid stares that came Harry's way. They took a couple of shortcuts, using the Marauder's Map to avoid running into anyone, before they made their way outside the Hospital Wing. Once they insured that the coast was clear, Harry removed the cloak from over them, stuffing it back into his bag before they walked into the hospital wing, where Madam Pomfrey was moving around, before her eyes snapped up, looking at Harry.

"I was wondering when I'd see you this year," remarked Madam Pomfrey with a sigh as she looked at Harry, an all too common guest to the Hospital Wing. "What have you gotten yourself into this time?"

"Nothing actually Madam Pomfrey, I was wondering if I could get some nutrient replenishing potions," said Harry and the Hogwarts healer looked at Harry with a surprised look.

"I was wondering if you were ever going to ask for them, you should have came in here during your first year to take them," said Pomfrey, as she moved down through her cabinet, looking for the item that Harry asked for.

"I would have had I known they existed," replied Harry defensively, which prompted Madam Pomfrey to mutter something under her breath, about students not being properly informed for ways they should keep up their health, before she turned to Harry, several vials in a black box in her hand.

"This should be enough to last you for at least a month, now these need to be taken on a full stomach, so they can work properly and three times a day, after every meal, is that clear?" asked Madam Pomfrey, as Harry took the box, nodding. "It is not a quick fix. It may take a couple of months before you are to a healthy level."

“Right thanks,” said Harry, as he left with Ginny, as they moved back, to leave the Hospital Wing. Harry would take one of the nutrient replenishing potions right when they were safely out of the corridors. Peeking at the map, Harry could see that the classroom that they used the previous night was once again unoccupied. Quickly, they placed the Invisibility Cloak over themselves, with Harry wondering if he could make a duplicate copy of the Marauder’s Map, so he could give it to Ginny. He had intended to write a letter to Sirius, he had better get on it as soon as he returned home. Quickly, they turned, moving behind a tapestry, to a shortcut and up a staircase that lead to their floor. Swiftly, they moved their way down. Other than a few students on their way to class, it was completely empty.

Ginny pushed the door open, allowing them both entry into the classroom, before she took the initiative to do the charms to make sure they were not disturbed, as Harry sat down, taking the nutrient replenishing. Quite frankly it was not the most appealing thing he had ever tasted in his life but at least it was a bit better tasting than many potions that he had to take, including that Skele-gro potion he was forced to take when Lockhart had the bright idea to relieve Harry of all of the bones in his right arm. Ginny sat down right on the chair next to Harry.

“I know it sounds strange, but I’ve been going over what happened during your first three years at Hogwarts, I pretty much know most of everything due to Ron loving to brag about the part he played in your adventures,” said Ginny and Harry rolled his eyes, if by some small, miniscule, microscopic miracle that he would ever forgive Ron, he was never going to tell him anything again. “And, I...well, I think Dumbledore doesn’t have your best interests in mind.”

“Dumbledore, he’s always been there...when I needed his help,” said Harry but he trailed off, the words sounding a bit forced in his mind, as he reflected on his mind. In fact, the one time that Dumbledore was directly involved in something, it was at the tail end, right at the last minute, after the danger had mostly passed, when he had saved the Philosopher’s Stone from Voldemort.

"Let's start with the beginning, Dumbledore put you with those Muggles for ten years, and then you received your Hogwarts letter," prompted Ginny.

"Yes," answered Harry quickly, wondering where Ginny was going with this.

"Don't you find it the least bit odd that you didn't receive any other letters inviting you to any other magical schools?" asked Ginny. "I mean, don't take this the wrong way, but I'm sure every headmaster and headmistress who ran a magical school would love to have the Boy-Who-Lived attending their school. Yet, you only get an invitation from Hogwarts."

"To be honest, I was just happy to go to a school where I could be away from the Dursleys for most of the year, in fact, I didn't even know there were more magical schools until Hermione had brought it up at the World Cup," said Harry with a frown, it was strange, considering he was supposed to be famous for what he did, so would more magical schools have invited him? "I didn't even know what I was until Hagrid brought me my letter."

"There's another thing, sending Hagrid to tell you, bless him, but I don't think he would be the best person to send on an important errand like that," said Ginny slowly, as if contemplating something. "Then again, Hagrid is one of the biggest supporters of Dumbledore, in every sense of the word, and also someone who views the world in a simplistic manner, black and white you know..."

"One of the first things I remember saying was how Dumbledore was a great man, he repeated it several times come to think of it," replied Harry. "I just don't see Hagrid being someone to go through with a scheme like that..."

"He might be as much of a pawn as you have been, Dumbledore playing on his loyalty, after all, Dumbledore did give him a job when he was expelled," said Ginny and Harry nodded. He could not see Hagrid doing anything deliberately malicious but being easily manipulated to go along with something could be plausible. Especially by someone who had always seemed to look out for him.

"Another thing, Hagrid seemed to make sure to mention that every witch and wizard who came out Slytherin was evil, I doubt any other person Dumbledore might have sent would told me anything like that, almost assuring that I would have went into Gryffindor," said Harry and Ginny nodded, pleased to see that Harry was drawing these conclusions mostly on his own. She had a feeling that Dumbledore was one of the few adults that Harry really trusted and respected, so his judgment and views about the Hogwarts Headmaster had been clouded. "The hat wanted to put me into Slytherin, but I argued until it put me in Gryffindor."

"That's...interesting," replied Ginny slowly, debating mentally as if she should say that pretty much the same thing happened to her. At first, she was willing to chalk it up to Tom's influence, but now she was wondering if she was mistaking. "You didn't share this with either Ron or Hermione, I take it."

"No, thankfully, considering what's happened with them lately, I don't dare to imagine the reactions they might have" answered Harry darkly. "I mentioned it to Dumbledore after what happened during second year, but he seemed ecstatic that I had made the choice to choose Gryffindor over Slytherin, saying that I was separated from Voldemort because I made the better choice. Well, Dumbledore didn't exactly say that, but he implied it."

"Now back to the Philosopher's Stone thing, the fact that Hagrid was trusted with a second important task, one that you were present when he retrieved it, doesn't that seem odd?" asked Ginny.

"Now it does, for sure, but another strange thing other than Fluffy and the mirror, there were all traps that...a first year could get through, or rather, a certain trio of first years," said Harry, trailing off in understanding. "I wonder, Fluffy was put on the trap door early on to catch our attention and the Stone was put in the mirror, but I do wonder if Dumbledore had the teachers develop the other traps with Hermione, Ron, and me in mind."

"Harry, I wouldn't be surprised if that was the case," said Ginny, with a slow nod. "Fluffy, Dumbledore had to know that Hagrid was going to

slip sooner or later. The Devil's Snare, Hermione would have figured out a way to dispel it sooner or later. The key room, with the broomsticks..."

"Obvious, considering I am the youngest seeker in a hundred years and talented on a broom," continued Harry. "Chess board, that's Ron's area of expertise. Troll, even though Quirell took care of it for us, we already defeated one of those, and the potions room, a logic problem that would give Hermione no trouble at all."

"There could no other explanation that Dumbledore would have wanted and intended you three to pass, after all, he could have filled all seven bottles with poison if he really wanted to keep the stone safe," offered Ginny as Harry nodded. "And then the fact that he gave you the Invisibility Cloak and made sure the mirror was put in a place where you could easily find it."

"And the Stone being in Hogwarts in the first place, that was a bit stupid in itself, why not just hide the Philosopher's Stone in a house under a Fidelius Charm or something?" asked Harry. "In fact, why even remove it from Gringotts in the first place? I can't see anyone getting anything past the goblins."

"Who's to say it's even the real Philosopher's Stone?" asked Ginny with a shrug, as she thought. "Dumbledore might have faked the traps, would you really put it past him to fake the prize at the end? Especially on the off chance that Voldemort did figure out how to remove the stone from the mirror on his own."

Harry just sat thoughtfully, Ginny did have a point and given the conclusion that Dumbledore was testing him through the trials, those that could be easily circumvented by a trio of first years.

"Whether or not the Stone was real, nothing that tempting should have been in a school, no matter how secure the school is, it's just asking for trouble," continued Ginny, which is something that Harry conceded to. It appeared that Ginny was bracing herself for what came next, as she closed her eyes before taking a deep breath. "Now...your second year..."

"We don't have to talk about this right now, if you don't want to Ginny," interjected Harry quietly but Ginny shook her head.

"We have to, Harry, this is when I stopped really seeing Dumbledore as the perfect leader of the light that my parents raised me to believe he was," answered Ginny swiftly. "Dumbledore allowed himself to get removed from the position of the Headmaster by Malfoy and then when you had saved me, he just happened to be there."

"Yeah, after he uncovered proof that Malfoy had blackmailed him, just after I had risked my life, a reason worth risking it mind you this time," said Harry, which caused Ginny to smile. "Still, I'd rather avoid fighting a fifty foot snake if I could help it."

"And not once did Dumbledore figure out what the monster inside the Chamber was, despite the fact the list of things that can petrify somebody is short, in fact, Hermione found out by putting the clues together, but and you mean to tell me Dumbledore couldn't deduce what a second year did," said Ginny. "He could have gotten us both killed and if Tom had escaped from the diary..."

"I don't want to even think about that," said Harry with a shudder. "The thing is, Dumbledore does know the reason why Voldemort attacked me all those years ago, I asked him, he never told me, he's never told me much of anything to be honest."

"Figures, why tell the person who's actually putting his life on the line?" said Ginny sarcastically.

"Yeah, that's really fair, let me do all the work and then spout a few lines of questionable wisdom that really tell me nothing of value," added Harry, before he moved on. "The Parseltongue thing, he did nothing to quell the rumors that I could be dark wizard. That's probably why a lot of people think I tricked the Goblet into accepting my name."

"Yes, at least that's what Hermione thinks," said Ginny bitterly and Harry just looked at her, with Ginny looking alarmed, at what just slipped out of her mouth. "Or at least that's what she says. She

seems to think you have a talent for the dark arts, considering you threw off the Imperius Curse, but you know what I think?"

"What?" asked Harry with interest.

"I think she's jealous that you can do something that she can't, I noticed a bit of a sour expression on her face when Ron mentioned that you did a Patronus, but didn't think of anything at it at the time" answered Ginny sadly, not really wanting to admit this, but Harry just looked at her, Ginny seemed saddened to break this unfortunate news to Harry, but Harry was glad that she did, it might save him some trauma later on. He looked into her eyes for a few more seconds, before nodding.

"They were my friends, it's going to be a bit difficult to see them as anything but that, but now I don't think I can ever trust them again, either of them," said Harry, who remembered the argument he had with Ron after his name came out of the Goblet and how Hermione was always trying to control his life, seeming to take it as an insult if anyone was better at her at anything. Harry knew these traits were always there and always prominent with them, but he was too naïve to see it. Or perhaps too desperate for friendship, Dudley had scared away anyone who tried to befriend him, so that's why he clung onto Ron and Hermione.

"I know, and believe me, I don't blame you one bit," said Ginny after a moment's pause. "Third year, I just have one question. Who in their right mind could even entertain the thought it was a good idea to give a thirteen year old girl a time turner?"

"It worked out in the end, conveniently, Hermione had the tool and the answer...it just seems like Hermione always has everything that I needed to survive my trials at the year," said Harry in sudden realization, catching onto something. "She solved the Potion riddle which led me straight to Voldemort, found out there was a basilisk, and the time turner...you do know about Sirius I take it?"

"Of course, Ron mentioned him casually over the summer, Hermione looked like she was going to hex him, it's lucky for you that he didn't tell anyone important about him, because the Ministry's in a foul

mood and if anyone tips them off, it's a Dementor's Kiss without a question," said Ginny, shuddering at the thought. "That's a good point about Hermione. She always seemed to lead you in the right direction. So, I wonder if Dumbledore's using her to keep tabs on you and make sure you don't stray from his intended path."

"Well I can see Hermione, considering how much you've learned about me that Ron's let slip, would you trust Ron with an important job?" asked Harry and Ginny shook her head, Harry had a valid point. "Still, the first three years of really circumstantial and several questions of what happened before that cast a doubt on Dumbledore's intentions towards me. What's he up to?"

"I'd like to know that as well Harry, I wondered if I could tell you this for a while," said Ginny. "Anyone who says anything bad regarding Dumbledore is tended to be thought of as going dark..."

"Wait a minute, how can we define if someone is truthfully going dark or not?" asked Harry suddenly, thinking of something. "I mean, there's dark magic to be sure, that can be used to harm innocent people. But, there has to be a fine line between using and abusing dark magic."

"Harry, I don't know, I think you might be right, but anything that talks about the psychological effects of using dark magic would have to be in the restricted section," said Ginny, with a frown as she thought about it. She wished she could offer more insight to Harry than that.

"Still, Parseltongue for instance, not many people do it, I truthfully think a lot of magic that's labeled dark is just really advanced magic that most people don't have the ability to do," said Harry. "It could be used either for help or to hurt, but since a lot of people can't do it, they think it would be dark."

"Harry, I never really heard it put that way," said Ginny with a thoughtful look on her face.

"Some of it might be evil, but really, I don't think all of it can be the corrupting influence that it's put out to be," theorized Harry. "We have to research this sometime, really get a clear perspective on

everything other than the normal black and white view but like you said, most of the really good reference books are in the restricted section.”

“Maybe you could ask someone to write you a note, say you need to get into the Restricted Section for the Tournament?” suggested Ginny.

“Moody, I could ask him, especially if I play the constant vigilance card, he seems to be really big on that,” said Harry, before checking his watch. “We have about forty five minutes left before the next period.”

“Let’s practice some of those spells that we looked up,” said Ginny, as she climbed to her feet, wand in hand, as she helped Harry clear out the desks to leave them a wide area, along with placing cushioning charms on the floor so they did not get seriously hurt when they hit the ground if the spells had connected.

As they practiced, mostly stunning spells, but a few other low level curses that would inconvenience an enemy, Ginny thought about Harry. It hurt her to see Harry misled like that for his entire time at Hogwarts and even more so when his world seemed to slowly come crashing down around him. Still, she owed to Harry to help him understand the truth. Ginny guessed that Harry might have had an idea, but had been too trustworthy to follow up on anything that he suspected. So much happened to Harry so far, and next time, he deserved to have his eyes wide open.

As she dueled with Harry, Ginny reflected on her own life and her family, something that she had been going over in her mind ever since the Chamber of Secrets. To her family or most accurately her mother, there was just right or wrong, good or evil, dark or light, it was just one or another, with no moral ground. The diary incident caused a bit of strain, not obvious to someone like Harry who had only seen the Weasleys as a perfect ideal family with no problems. The truth was that Ginny felt her mother was obsessive in controlling every aspect of the lives of her children and husband. Everything had to go her way or the high way. Her father was not about to step in and put his foot down, Ginny had come to the conclusion that he had been

whipped into submission and had a spine that had been reduced to jelly.

For that reason was why Bill and Charlie had left the country to pursue their careers as soon as they left Hogwarts, why Percy had thrown himself into his career at the Ministry. It also had to partly do with why Fred and George had acted out; even though Ginny had to admit that her twin brothers most likely would have been troublemakers anyway. Still, there acting out and their ambitions to open a joke shop was somewhat fueled by the domineering nature of Molly Weasley. Ron, naturally, felt a combined pressure of wanting to stand out from his siblings and the same pressure that the other Weasley children felt. This had caused him to be irrational, petty, jealous, and simple minded, with a tendency to lash out angrily at the simplest of things. Ironical that he fancied a girl that was perhaps as controlling as his own mother, but as far as Ginny was concerned, Ron and Hermione deserved each other.

Then there was Ginny's own relationship with her mother. She was expected to be a proper lady, her only purpose to be trained to marry some nice man, to cook, clean, and raise children, to stand on the sidelines like a good little witch. At least, in the world according to Molly Weasley, who had views that were old fashioned even by the standards of the Wizarding World. It was considered a high crime to Molly for her daughter to do anything that was not considered proper. Hell, holding some boy's hand might have been caused for an ear splitting multi hour lecture and learning how to properly defend herself, while she was helping Harry train for the tournament would be scandalous. Yet, Harry needed someone who could stand beside him like an equal, fighting his battles with him, not someone that he felt he had to babysit because she could not defend herself.

"Are you alright Ginny?" asked Harry, as he had fired another spell that knocked Ginny slightly off balance. She collapsed to her knees, as Harry put the counter charm on her. "You looked a little distracted."

"Fine, Harry," said Ginny, as Harry grabbed both of her hands, to give her assistance to get back to her feet. She allowed him to help her up,

before she looked at him. "Just everything recently...a bit overwhelming to think about..."

"I know," said Harry in a sympathetic voice as they continued to practice the spells for much more time to come. At first, Harry was a bit reluctant to throw anything at Ginny that could hurt her but she insisted that she could handle herself and besides, it was not like it was anything that would cause lasting injury. As it turned out, she was right on both accounts. When they moved towards more advanced and slightly more dangerous spells, it was undecided how they could do it, as it would be foolish to practice it on each other. Still, there was no doubt in Harry's mind that he would have to learn those spells, especially once he got to the latter tasks.

Mentally, Harry was a bit shaken by the recent revelations that he and Ginny had come to the conclusion of. Actually, no matter how much it hurt, Harry was glad he came to these now, because he could get his life back on track easily. Later on, he might have been too far along to turn back. He knew one thing. He could never trust Ron, Hermione, or Dumbledore again.

It was like he was going through an entirely new era of his life. As he intently watched Ginny move to get in position to fire off of a spell, so he could practice his shield charm, Harry blocked it, as they continued to move. If he was going to be put into this Tournament, he would make the most of it.

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Unfortunately their time alone had to end, as they both had classes the next period. Ginny was walking to the greenhouses towards Herbology. Looking forward, she spotted a blond haired girl, with a dreamy expression on her face, hanging out from the rest of the crowd, as some girls cast her disgusted looks, as if offended by her presence

"Hi Luna!" called Ginny brightly and Luna looked up at Ginny, with a smile as she walked over. "I haven't seen you much over the last few days."

"I've been trying to stay out of the way out of whatever possessing the rest of the school, causing their brains to go numb," commented Luna seriously. "I mean, people actually think that Harry Potter's actually put his name in the Goblet of Fire. It's kind of silly, I'm sure Harry's smart, but it would take someone really cunning and powerful to get past the Goblet. Especially since it's been charmed for centuries to only accept students from three schools but I guess that it's kind of too much to have people actually think beyond explanations that are entirely simplistic."

"I'm glad you see it that way, I'm beginning to think, you, Harry, and me are the only sane people in this entire school," answered Ginny which caused Luna to nod her head. "I've been talking to Harry, about my concerns he's starting to see what's really going on around him and he's beginning to see certain people what they really are."

"Good for him," responded Luna, she could tell that Harry finally opening his eyes had made her friend happy. "Maybe now I can actually meet him, now that he's shed his baggage."

"I'm sure he'd love to meet you, maybe we can get an added perspective onto how to prepare for this tournament," said Ginny.

"That'd be nice, do you think Harry would agree?" asked Luna with slight uncertainty.

"Of course he would, he could use someone else other than me as a friend," said Ginny and Luna nodded with a smile, as they made their way over into the greenhouses, keeping a wide path from the other girls in their year. Both had been isolated, Ginny because of the Chamber of Secrets incident and Luna because of how she tended to think differently than others. It was disturbing how the Wizarding World could easily turn their backs on a person, as easily as they could worship them. Harry was the textbook example for this.

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Ron Weasley was in a bad mood. It was bad enough Harry had to be famous, more powerful, and have many more girls lusting after him than Ron could ever dream about, but did he have to enter this

tournament just to rub it into his face. Throughout his entire life, Ron had never gotten anything that he wanted, he had always been just there. He was always someone's little brother and most recently, Harry Potter's sidekick. That label really ate away at Ron but the thing was that Harry did not seem to be grateful for his fame at all. If Ron had that many girls throwing themselves at him, he would most certainly take advantage of it.

Worse of all, Ron was sure that Harry was sneaking around with his little sister. There was no poof but they were disappearing at the same time at the oddest times. Ron was angry, that Harry was using Ginny as a crutch, no doubt thinking that both he and Hermione would forgive him. The youngest male Weasley would not stand by and let Harry break his baby sister's heart. She was much too young to be alone with a boy anyway, especially someone that she liked and that had never gave her the time of day.

Of course, Ron neglected to recall that it was simply because of the fact that he had done everything in his power to exclude Ginny from him, Harry, and Hermione.

Moving towards Harry's bed in the dormitory, Ron managed to open Harry's trunk, to look for the Invisibility Cloak and the Marauder's Map, so he could keep an eye on him. Snorting at the obviously oversized and worn clothes, Ron was enraged that Harry kept playing the tortured little orphan card. He knew for a fact that the Potters were one of the most well of pureblood families and Harry could pay for decent clothes. But, that would be too much to ask, Harry had to keep playing for sympathy.

Moving through the trunk, not paying attention to where he was throwing things, Ron became more angered by the moment. The Cloak and Map was not there. Angrily throwing several books along with a few pieces of clothes to the side, Ron stomped out of the dormitory, without bothering to clear up the evidence that he was there. He was rather late for the next class. Hermione had been regarding him with indifference over the past couple of days. While they had both agreed that Harry put his name in the Goblet, they got into a full blown argument about the reason why Harry put his name into the Goblet. Ron sighed, Hermione was missing the point, as she

was with many times, including her recent fascination about house elves. While Ron felt Harry was egotistical, self centered, and an attention hog, he was confident that there was no chance whatsoever that Harry would ever turn dark.

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Harry had returned from the Owlery, sending a letter to Sirius about all of what had happened recently, most obviously his inclusion in the Tournament. He did mention that he came to several conclusions, that he would share with Sirius once they could meet up in person but also cautioned Sirius that he should be careful. He was still a fugitive from Ministry law and would receive the Dementor's Kiss if he had been caught. Right now, he made his way towards Moody's office, thinking that he needed to learn some security charms for his trunk as well, considering the state he found his things in when he came back to the dormitory briefly. It was obvious who the culprit was, even though Harry could not prove it. Still, he would have to keep anything of value in his bag, until he could learn some security spells that would be of use. It was a slight miracle that he was falling into the habit of keeping both the Map and the Cloak on him at all times.

Peering at the Marauder's Map, Harry spotted two dots in the office of Moody, one of them being Moody and the other saying 'Bartemius Crouch'. Briefly, Harry wondered if Crouch had been going over with Moody ways to see if the Goblet had been tampered with. That had to be the case, but Harry did know that it was a bad idea to ask for something that might sound suspicious in front of Crouch. He was as by the book as they came.

Leaving the area quickly, under the cover of invisibility, Harry mentally thought of an alternate plan. He needed to find some other way to get his way into the Restricted Section. Truthfully he could come back later, but for every moment he wasted, was a moment that he did not have to prepare.

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Later that night, Harry had left dinner, with Ginny following him and he noticed another girl following them. Ginny nodded, before encouraging the girl to walk over with them.

“Harry, this is my friend Luna, she’s in Ravenclaw, I was wondering if she could come and join us when we practice those spells,” said Ginny.

“Of course, the more the merrier,” replied Harry, after all Ginny was a pretty good judge of character, so he had a feeling that Luna would be someone that he would get along with. Luna walked over, standing on the other side of Harry. “Pleased to meet you Luna.”

“Likewise Harry, it’s nice to meet you and not the fictional character by the same name,” said Luna with a smile, as she looked at Harry. “I must say, Ginny has good taste.”

Harry and Ginny both stopped, either unable to formulate a sentence based on her statement, as Luna just stood back with a knowing smile. She decided to break the ice by interrupting the silence.

“It’s also nice to see you’re taking a proactive role in preparing for this tournament, after the unfair hand life has dealt you by putting you in the Tournament,” said Luna.

“I should have started being more proactive three years ago,” remarked Harry, as the three walked away from the Great Hall.

“Better late than never,” answered Luna with a smile.

“Yeah, Harry, it might have took a while, but I think you’re really going come into your own now,” added Ginny.

“Yeah, considering I have friends that will look out for me and be there for once,” added Harry.

Little did they know from the distance, a certain fourth year girl clenched her fists together, as she watched Harry walk off with two girls that were not her.

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Harry, Luna, and Ginny had spent the first hour after dinner doing homework, but several hours after that, until almost midnight, practicing spells. Luna was a valuable resource, she had several ideas that might have seemed to be a little peculiar at first, but they worked well enough. They returned to bed, a couple of hours past curfew, but thanks to the Marauder's Map and the Invisibility Cloak, they managed to make it back without meeting anyone.

On that day, Harry had a Divination Class and a burst of sudden inspiration came to him on exactly how to get into the Restricted Section the library. Trelawney was lecturing them about planetary movements for what seemed like the hundredth time but Harry was forming together a plan in the mind on how to accomplish his goal. When the rest of the class left, Harry waited, before he sat rigid, just as Trelawney had done after his examination during his third year.

Trelawney looked up, seeing that Harry Potter was still there. She moved to say something but recognized the symptoms at once. Harry was sitting rigid, with a glassy look over his face and was shaking slightly. Extraordinary as it seemed, it looked like Harry was about to give a prophecy. Trelawney remained silent and still, not wanting to interrupt. Such a thing could have catastrophic implications as Harry drew in all of his breath before he began to speak.

The choice of the Divination Professor will be the difference between death and paradise. The Boy-Who-Lived requires a note...one that will give him unlimited access to the restricted area of the great library. Should the Divination Professor refuse to grant this wish, than she will set off a chain of catastrophic events that will lead to the end of the world as we know it. Only by giving the Boy-Who-Lived this note, can doomsday be averted.

Harry suddenly opened his eyes, as he watched Trelawney look at him awe struck.

"Professor, what just happened, I feel like I abruptly dozed off?" asked Harry in mock confusion that Trelawney interpreted as genuine.

“Harry, as strange as it might sound, you have just given a prophecy, I fear my addition judgments of you were off, you may possess the Inner Eye after all,” said Trelawney as Harry struggled to keep a straight face at how gullible Trelawney was. “I must say, this is a gift that should be nurtured and I am expert on the matter, so if you feel like you need any addition help outside the scope of this class, feel free to stop by my office at any time.”

“Actually, Professor, I do need something right now,” said Harry and Trelawney looked absolutely horrified, as it was beginning to unravel right away. “I need to access the Restricted Section, you know to train for the Triwizard Tournament, because I’ve got three less years of education than the other competitors.”

“Of course Harry,” said Trelawney, as she moved forward, to get a piece of parchment, a quill, and some ink, before she scribbled him a note, and shoved it in Harry’s hand. “There, that will give you unrestricted access for the next year”

“Thanks, Professor Trelawney,” said Harry, as he took the note and his things before leaving the room.

“Do not mention it Harry, it was the least I can do,” said Trelawney, breathing a sigh of relief that her actions had stopped doomsday, at least for this particular prophecy.

Once Harry got past the classroom, he broke out into laughter, unable to keep a straight face. For once in his life, he was glad he had taken Divination, because he would have never managed to manipulate his way into the Restricted Section any other way.

Time passes, as we get towards the First Task which will be either in the next chapter or the following one, depending on how long the next chapter runs. I do know Hogsmeade will be in the next chapter and Harry finds out more things that Dumbledore has been neglecting to tell him.

Chapter Four: Discoveries

On his next break, Harry wasted no time heading straight to the library to take advantage of his newly coerced Restricted Section privileges. Moving in, careful not to look too suspicious, Harry made his way straight to the Restricted Section. Browsing through, Harry had many options, it was difficult to choose which books he should take out for a closer look. Eventually he settled on a few books that he thought to be interested.

The first one had advanced defensive magic, beyond the scope of what was taught even at Hogwarts by the looks of the things. The book looked a bit dated and some of the magic inside looked like it might slightly be questionable. Harry was not interested in learning to play nice, his enemies would not, so why should he? Another book was ways than the mind could be manipulated by magic and how to best defend against them. Some of them looked to be rather disturbing to Harry, but he reasoned that he would be prepared. Finally Harry had managed to unearth a book about a branch of magic called Occlumency. It apparently shielded the mind from another branch, called Legilimency, the ability to retrieve information from the mind. Harry shuddered at the thought that someone could be going through his mind, seeing his inner most secrets and he just had this feeling that Dumbledore knew Legilimency. It perfectly explained why he never seemed surprised what a person was thinking. Harry wanted to hide his distrust, to prevent the Headmaster from thinking that Harry did not follow his word as gospel. Until then, Harry would just have to avoid eye contact with him and Snape as well, another person who Harry suspected was taking peeks into his mind.

Moving forward with his books, careful not to look too suspicious once again. He walked off with them, intending to do them tonight after him, Luna, and Ginny did their homework. They could look over them and make some notes on what they had found.

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Albus Dumbledore sat in his office, deep in thought. This entire mess in the tournament had been uncomfortable, but he had a strong

suspicion it was going to happen. Harry Potter had been thrown into the Tournament, against his will and would have to compete. Albus was glad that Harry did not know that there were spells that could determine whether or not he had written his name on the piece of parchment that had been placed in the Goblet of Fire. It was imperative that Voldemort be returned to power so Harry could fulfill his destiny as mandated by the Prophecy. Only with Voldemort returning to a body could they be technically considered equals.

Dumbledore smiled, he was slowly grooming Harry as his successor and he would take Dumbledore's place as the shining symbol that struck fear in the forces of evil. Naturally Harry did not know about this, because Dumbledore was worried that Harry might let this eventual role go to his head. After all, it was not every day that a fourteen year old wizard got the honor to succeed Albus Dumbledore?

It was questioned by many of the decision to send Harry to his Muggle relatives, but it was for the good of the future of the Wizarding World. Harry had great potential to be an extremely powerful wizard, but he had to come into power naturally. It was worrying, he had did his first bit of accidental magic when he was only days old. By putting him with the Dursleys, it stalled his growth, even if the boy did not have the best childhood. Still, it was for his own good, wiser wizards than Harry had been corrupted by too much power.

Dumbledore suggested to Sirius to have Lily and James switch Secret Keepers at the last minute, before modifying his memory to make it seem like that Sirius had come up with the idea on the own. He knew Peter had been on Voldemort's side for a year before that. It was nothing against Sirius, or Lily and James for that matter. It was just that the world needed someone who could be groomed to have Dumbledore's values and have the power to enforce them when Albus moved onto the next great adventure.

A knock on his door had brought Dumbledore out of his thoughts. His eyes snapped up, looking towards the door, to see what was on the other side.

“Enter,” said Dumbledore and the door opened, with Hermione Granger walking inside, looking rather irritated. “Miss Granger, do have a seat please and tell me what’s on your mind.”

Hermione sat down right in front of Dumbledore, before sighing.

“Professor, I really hate to say this, but I’m really beginning to think that Harry is turning to the dark arts,” answered Hermione and Dumbledore sighed, this was not the first time Hermione had come to him with this complaint. He had already heard it for the Patronus and Harry throwing off the Imperius Curse. The girl could not stand having anyone do even one piece of magic better than her. “Well, today in Transfiguration, Harry managed to complete the work before I did. Sure I managed to complete it shortly after but still it isn’t like him, he’s been besting me more and more this year.”

“Miss Granger, I’m certain that Harry is just being a bit more proactive with his work since Mr. Weasley is not there to distract him with Chess or Quidditch,” said Dumbledore calmly with a twinkle in his eye.

“No, you don’t understand, I’ve cut all ties with Harry, after the Goblet, he had to have found a way past it, I don’t know how, but he did,” said Hermione in a desperate voice. “I don’t know what to do, Professor.”

“I doubt Harry is turning to the dark arts, but on the slight chance that I may be mistaken, he might be to do it because yourself and young Ronald jumped to the wrong conclusion when his name came out of the Goblet,” theorized Dumbledore, causing Hermione to look scandalized at this might somehow be her fault.

“Well, Professor, it looks like Harry thinks he could live without us, because he’s already replaced us, with Ginny Weasley and that Looney Lovegood girl,” answered Hermione with a slight sense of bitterness. “After all I’ve done for Harry, he thinks he can betray me like that.”

Dumbledore sat, slightly amused but interested at what Hermione had told him. Harry had finally noticed the youngest Weasley girl. That was nice for his eventual plan. Weasleys never turned dark and

if Harry and Ginny's friendship blossomed into something more, Dumbledore was confident that she would keep him on the right path, to prevent him from turning towards the allure of dark magic and he would be ready to succeed Dumbledore when the time came.

"Miss Granger, I am sorry, I feel your accusations are rather unfounded and I would advise distancing yourself from Harry and his friends for a few weeks, before apologizing to him and trying to mend your friendship," answered Dumbledore, who did want Hermione back in Harry's good books as she was a good source of information on how his successor was doing. Her mind was so organized it was easy for a Legilimens to find information. Dumbledore had opened his office door to Hermione ever since the troll during her first year, especially if she had any concerns regarding Harry. He had awarded her with access to some of his mundane books from his personal library, something that looked rather impressive to a muggleborn.

"I'll take your advice under consideration, Professor," said Hermione coolly as she slowly got up and left the office.

Dumbledore sat there, to get back to his plans, musing about that his Defense Against the Dark Arts teacher was acting a bit out of character. After a brief thought, he came to the conclusion that it was nothing that he should be concerned about. It had been several years since he had close contact with Moody, his various responsibilities had mandated little time for social engagements.

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Hermione had left Dumbledore's office in a bit of a bad temper. How could he not take her word seriously? The signs were there, Harry had to be turning dark but Dumbledore refused to see it. Did Dumbledore really not care for Harry's own well being? Hermione felt she was doing the right thing, to step away from Harry for his own good. Maybe he would understand the destructive path that he was being sent on. But, it was becoming more unlikely that Harry would see the truth. After all, Ginny had caught him on the rebound. Despite Hermione's best efforts, Ginny still had feelings for Harry and he was gaining more confidence by the day, improving at his academics slowly, but steadily. He would be more likely to stand up for himself

than what he was told to do. All of Hermione's hard work to get Harry where she wanted him was beginning to deteriorate before her very eyes.

"Well, did you tell Dumbledore?" asked Ron in an uneasy voice, as he walked down the hallway, but he saw Hermione's bad mood, stepping back slightly.

"I told him of my concerns, he seems to think that Harry's not going dark," said Hermione.

"Well there you go, Dumbledore told you that he doesn't think Harry's going dark, now will you believe it?" asked Ron.

"No I don't, I think this is the one time where Dumbledore's not right about something, he's not perfect, don't you dare give me that look Ronald Weasley," said Hermione hotly.

"Well even if Dumbledore didn't say it, I think that it's kind of silly, I mean Harry turning dark, that's a bit far-fetched, isn't it?" asked Ron skeptically. "I mean, what are you going to say next. That Dad's secretly You-Know-Who?"

"Ron this is a serious situation!" shouted Hermione in an irritated tone of voice.

"Hermione, listen to me, Harry just doesn't have the character to go dark, I mean, his mum and dad were killed by You-Know-Who," answered Ron slowly. "You're looking for something too complex, that's not even there. It's obvious that he put his name into the Goblet of Fire because he's an attention seeking prat!"

"Oh come off of it Ron, you know you're jealous of Harry, he hates his fame, surely you've noticed that?" asked Hermione.

"Well you haven't noticed that there's no way that Harry could go dark," countered Ron in a bit of a tempered manner. "You know something Hermione, you're not always right! In fact, you have some nerve talking about jealousy when it comes to Harry."

“What is that supposed to mean?” demanded Hermione, as she placed her hand on her wand, getting in Ron’s face, but he held his wand.

“Harry beat you in Transfiguration today,” replied Ron smugly. “About time that someone took you down a peg, too bad it had to be him, it’ll just swell his head even more.”

“Well, at least Harry might be developing some ambition. That’s more than I can say for you!” shouted Hermione. “You haven’t been exactly helping spread the word about S.P.E.W. lately.”

“Hermione, they....like...to...work!” shouted Ron as he removed his wand fully from his pocket, as he glared in Hermione’s face. “Besides, I think it’s not a good idea what you’re doing.”

“Oh, I’d suppose you’d like it if someone told you to clean and cook for them without ever receiving one Galleon,” said Hermione with her eyes bulged out.

“See, you’re missing the point again!” shouted Ron, as he stood up to his full height. “Using Harry’s name to drum up membership, he’s not going to like it at all when he finds out.”

“Harry won’t do anything about it,” responded Hermione in a confident voice.

“Well, if you keep using his name without his permission, you better hope that Harry’s not going dark,” answered Ron angrily.

“You know what I don’t have to put up with your attitude right now,” said Hermione.

“Who has the attitude, Hermione?” challenged Ron and Hermione took her wand out and pointed it right at Ron. Ron did as well, as they were pointing their wands at each other, sparks flying from them as neither refused to back off.

“Well what do we have here? Two Gryffindors about to duel in the hallway,” stated a voice, as they paled, seeing Professor Snape walk

right towards them, seeing what was happening. "And causing a hallway disruption, I believe that will be twenty points from Gryffindor each and a weeks worth of Detention with Mr. Filch starting tonight. Perhaps that will teach you not to pull your wands in the hallway and act like civilized human beings."

Snape turned his back, walking off, as Ron and Hermione glared at each other, each of them thinking that it was the fault of the other, but not saying anything. Hermione stalked off, to go to the library for the rest of the break period, while Ron just stood in the hallway, stewing in his own frustration. Everything appeared to be falling apart right before his very eyes. He wondered if it might be a good idea to apologize to Harry, to stomach his fame. At least Harry did not snap at him for every little thing. After a few seconds thought, Ron decided against it for now. He would let Harry stew for a bit longer, perhaps it would teach him a lesson.

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That first week after Harry's name was removed from the Goblet was something that he would not be able to get through without Ginny and also to a certain extent, Luna. All the stares, both good and bad, were a bit uncomfortable to Harry at first, but now Harry saw them as a routine part of his day that he had to deal with. In fact, he was quite bored with them, especially the dark comments about how he put his name in the Goblet. Even Malfoy's comments about how Harry had no chance to survive the tournament only served to disinterest Harry. As easy as it would have been to find a way around the rules, now a part of Harry wanted to win the tournament. It was not for himself, but to prove that he was more than a legend with a scar on his forehead. Even though he was a bit apprehensive about the reasons that he was entered and who did it, Harry vowed to make the most of this unusual situation. If nothing else, he could be prepared just in case the person who placed his name in the Goblet had taken a more hands on approach when they saw the tasks failed to finish him off.

Right now he was in Potions, sitting right by Neville. Snape was in his usual bad mood, but that was to be expected. If Snape ever was in a good mood, one would think that something was wrong. He had given them a particularly difficult potion to complete and Harry had looked

at the Potion instructions calmly, reading them. Without Hermione processing the Potion and getting right into making it perfectly, without even thinking about it, Harry could understand the instructions more at his own speed. He moved, carefully completing the potion that Snape had given to him at his own speed. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw Neville, who always struggled in Potions class because of his intimidation of Snape, about to do something that would cause a miniature explosion.

“You’re supposed to let that cool for about three minutes before you put that in, Neville,” muttered Harry out of the corner of his mouth and Neville paused, before nodding. Most times he did fine enough but he made one mistake and his confidence shattered. Doing as Harry instructed, Neville was pleased to discover that the potion was reaching its desired stage.

The period wrapped to the conclusion, with Harry discreetly giving Neville a few more instructions when it looked like he was about to veer off into a dangerous path with his potion. Snape was making his rounds, to check on the status of the completed potion. Stopping at Neville, Snape looked about ready to make his usual scathing comment but he looked at Neville’s completed potion for what seemed like an eternity. Slowly, he turned to face the table where Hermione and Ron were sitting at, fixing his eyes on Hermione.

“Miss Granger, I believe I told you that you were not to help Mr. Longbottom ever again in my class,” said Snape calmly.

“I didn’t, Professor!” protested Hermione as she glared right at Harry and Neville. “Harry was the one that was helping him, I saw him.”

“Five points from Gryffindor for lying, Miss Granger,” said Snape swiftly. “Do not insult my intelligence. We all know how inadequate Potter is at the art of Potion making, it’s a miracle that he completes his own potion without disaster at times.”

Hermione looked at Harry, glaring at him, the first time she had even bothered to look at Harry that he had noticed since that night. Neville wisely did not speak up to correct Professor Snape. Snape looked at Harry’s potion as well, but when he could not even make a scathing

comment, Snape settled for just walking off, moving onto the next table.

"All of you are to put a sample of your work on my desk, clearly marked for it to be graded and the results will be returned to you during our next class," said Snape calmly. "You are all dismissed."

The entire class had left, with Hermione still looking at Harry like he had mortally offended her. Harry stood back slightly enough to allow Hermione and Ron to pass, with Neville standing by him.

"Thanks, Harry," replied Neville gratefully, but he had an uncertain look on his face. "Do you think Snape really did know you helped me?"

"I'm sure of it but he never gives me credit for anything I do, so by accusing me he would be doing just that," said Harry as he looked at Neville. "I think that you do have the potential to do good, but it's just that you need confidence."

"I know," said Neville in a despondent voice. "It's just that my grandmother wants me to live up to what my Mum and Dad did and...well I don't know if I'm good enough to do that."

"That's nice, but what do you want?" asked Harry and Neville seemed dumbstruck on how to answer that, looking at Harry with a confused look on his face.

"Well, I want my parents back but I doubt that's going to happen," said Neville, as he looked to make sure no one was coming, before looking at Harry. "I've never told anyone this, but I suppose you have the right to know, I mean you've lost your parents as well."

"They're dead?" questioned Harry in a sympathetic voice.

"No, that would be much kinder to them, they were driven mad by some of You-Know-Who's followers, not too much longer after he fell, by overexposure to the Cruciatus Curse, there in St. Mungos, alive, if you could call it that" said Neville darkly, with Harry not knowing what to say but this did explain how Neville reacted how he did when

Moody had demonstrated the curses in class. "Famous Aurors, among the best according to Gran, so I've got a lot to live up to."

"I know how that feels," said Harry under his breath, as he remembered some people expected him to be some uncorrupted symbol of purity, someone who could be a status symbol against dark wizards. In some ways, the so called light side was worse than the Muggle loathing purebloods, as they had similar prejudices. The Parseltongue thing was all too fresh in Harry's mind as a perfect example of this. "Especially considering this Tournament coming up, most of the school expects I put my name in the Goblet, now I have to live up to my fame publicly again."

"I don't believe you could have put your name in the Goblet Harry," voiced Neville before he looked at Harry. "Is there anyway you could have gotten out of the Tournament?"

"No, doesn't look that way, I suppose I could do the minimum amount required for each of the tasks, but I don't know how to explain it, but a part of me wants to actually put forth the effort to win," said Harry. "Besides, it's giving me a cast iron excuse to do all kinds of research and training that would give me strange looks at any other time."

"I'd figured you'd be preparing, you seem to be in the middle of everything bad that's happened," said Neville. "Which is strange, considering that these odd and dangerous things have only seemed to happen since you've come to Hogwarts."

"That might be by design," said Harry and Neville nodded, but Harry recognized the look in his eyes "If you wanted to join us, you can. We do our homework first and then we practice what we've looked up."

"Are you sure Harry?" asked Neville in an uncertain voice but it did give him an excuse to get away from the Gryffindor Common Room for a few hours. After all, it was rather tiresome to hear Ron Weasley and Hermione Granger bicker all of the time. "I don't want to be a burden."

"No burden at all Neville, it's just me, Ginny, and Luna Lovegood, besides it might get your grandmother off of your back a little bit," said Harry and Neville seemed interested.

"Okay, you've made up my mind, Harry," said Neville before he grew seriously. "Now you won't tell anyone about my parents, will you?"

"I won't, that's your place to do that," said Harry. "I can see why you didn't want anyone to know, Malfoy and his goons tend to use everything to put people down as it is."

"Yeah, wouldn't want to give them any more ammo," answered Neville with a nod. "So, it's after dinner, right?"

Harry nodded in confirmation, before they walked off towards the Great Hall.

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Over the next week, Neville, Luna, Ginny, and Harry continued to work on spells in a variety of unused classrooms. They come to the conclusion that they needed to switch, to not have anyone get wise to what they were doing. Right now, Harry was taking a good look on the book of Occlumency that he found.

"Listen to this," said Harry, as the other three looked up, getting their attention. "Contrary to popular belief, a well organized mind is not a defense against Legilimency attacks. In fact, it just leaves the mind more susceptible to attacks, as the user can find the emotions they want easily as everything is organized in a linear manner. It is not to say that your thoughts should be left out in the open but rather placed behind an organized illusion that will allow the Legilimens to believe they can easily find what they are looking for."

"Makes perfect sense to me," said Luna. "I mean, it's just like shoving all of the clutter in your bedroom under the bed. On the outside, it looks like everything's organized and in a logical manner, but really anything of value is a bit out of place."

“So, we need to organize something that serves as a front in our head to make a Legilimens think our minds are easily readable, but leave our thoughts and emotions as they might be normally,” summarized Ginny.

“Whatever works, I’m still unnerved that Snape can read minds,” said Neville darkly.

“And Dumbledore as well, explains why he does know everything,” said Luna calmly. “I never did trust him too much. Someone whose eye twinkles has to be a bit suspect.”

“If anyone can master Occlumency first, it’s Harry,” said Ginny. “After all, didn’t it say that it took similar concentration to master it as it did to break the Imperius Curse. So, once Harry gets it down, he can help the rest of us.”

Harry nodded in agreement, as he looked over the book, glossing over a section where it talked about a common misconception was that Occlumency had to do with clearing one’s mind. In reality, attempting to clear the mind, inadvertently pushed thoughts to the front and allowed them to be easily able to be latched upon a Legilimens.

As he made several more notes, while the others wrapped up their homework, before they move to the spells for the even. Stunning and shield spells had already been mastered by the group, along with several other low level discomfort spells. Dizziness and nausea hexes might have seemed silly, but it did serve the purpose of putting an opponent off balance to leave them unable to defend themselves for more damaging attacks. Luna had come up with the brilliant idea of using cheering charms as an offensive weapon. It would cause enemies to become too reckless because they were not taking anything seriously and it was very unlikely they would see a cheering charm as a threat before it was too late.

“Good enough for today,” answered Harry as they concluded their practice. It was getting the point where there were several offensive attacks that were a bit too dangerous to use on each other, as it

would require a trip to the Hospital Wing and some awkward questions.

"I've been looking through one of the books, Harry, it mentioned silent spell casting," said Ginny. "I think we should try some of the simpler spells silently.

"We should learn that in our sixth year, but I suppose it would be a good idea for us to get a jump on things right now," said Harry in an agreeable manner, before he consulted the Marauder's Map, before pausing. "Crouch is in Moody's office again, every time I look, he's there."

"Maybe they're having an affair," suggesting Luna nonchalantly which caused Ginny, Neville, and Harry to all bulge their eyes out, in various states of revulsion, none of them knowing what to say. It was just one of those blunt statements and borderline disturbing that Luna made from time to time that words could not be enough to respond.

"That eye, that eye," muttered Harry in a horrified tone of voice, as Ginny wrapped her arms around him in a hug, attempting to comfort him of those traumatic images that Luna's innocent suggestion had caused.

"Thanks, Luna," answered Ginny, as she continued to hold Harry tight, briefly wondering if he was milking his trauma slightly, not that she minded.

"You're welcome," responded Luna before she grew serious or at least serious for Luna. "Still, it is odd that Crouch is coming into his office that often, I wonder if there is something up. Maybe Crouch is secretly a Death Eater and has in fact locked Moody up in his own office, in a trunk or something and is using Polyjuice Potion to impersonate Moody."

"Mr. Crouch a Death Eater?" asked Ginny in confusion. "I can't see anyone who Percy worships being on anything but the side of the straight and narrow."

"It could happen," said Luna with a shrug. "Unless you want to go with my other theory..."

"NO!" shouted Harry, Neville, and Ginny in unison but while one theory presented by Luna seemed to be disturbing and the other seemed to be a bit far fetched. Then again, there had to be some explanation why Crouch seemed to be in Moody's office all of the time. He would have to play it carefully, as letting either Moody or even Crouch to know what he knew. All Harry could do is be on his guard and make sure his friends stayed on theirs.

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Leaving Potions class early would normally be a cause of celebration but right now, Harry would rather take his chances with Snape. When Colin Creevey had been sent to retrieve Harry, he had eagerly mentioned to Harry that there would be photographers from the Daily Prophet. That put Harry in a bit of tizzy, the last thing he wanted was more press but it was also important because his wand was going to be checked for any flaws and was mandated that he attended.

"Glad to see you could make it, Harry!" cried Ludo Bagman in a cartoonish manner and Harry just rolled his eyes slightly, he had no choice. He saw the heads of the three schools and Crouch slinking back in the shadows. Harry could not help but notice that he looked a bit ill which also raised even more questions in his mind. He also saw the three champions, much older than him but Harry was not going to be intimidated. Finally, he saw the wand maker Mr. Ollivander in the background. Bagman stepped back, to reveal a blond haired woman with glasses. Harry automatically got a 'sleazy tabloid reporter' vibe from her. "This is Rita Skeeter from the Daily Prophet, she is here to be doing a small piece on the Tournament."

"Now, Ludo, I don't think it will be that small," said Rita, as she looked at Harry, with a calculating expression on her face. Harry automatically knew this was not going to be about the Tournament; rather this was going to be about me. "Now, I'm sure Harry can come and talk to me, a little bit of flavor from our youngest champion."

“If you’re going to talk to me, it’s going to be done in public where there are witnesses that can see what I’m saying,” answered Harry firmly, causing Rita to be taken slightly aback. “After all, we wouldn’t want you accidentally misinterpret something I say. It could be very bad for your reputation and could jeopardize your chances of future interviews.”

“Oh, of course, Harry,” said Rita in an uncertain voice, before she regained her composure. She would have to tread lightly. Harry was not the naïve child she had expected him to be. “But, I’m sure of are readers would like to know exactly how you got entered into the Triwizard Tournament and the Goblet of Fire got fooled into thinking their were more than three champions?”

“I’d be first in line to want to know that as well,” said Harry and Rita raised her eyebrows, so Harry decided to elaborate. “Someone had to have put my name in the Goblet of Fire, I don’t know how or why. I don’t want to expect on what motive they could have in mind.”

“Naturally,” said Rita as Harry could tell she wanted to speculate on this and had a feeling she was concocting a story about there being a plot to murder the Boy-Who-Live, that would no doubt slam the Ministry for their gross incompetence. If that was the way Rita wanted to interpret his statements, than Harry could not be held accountable for anything Rita said. As long as she did write blatant lies about Harry and his friends, Harry did not really care what she wrote.

“Would that be all?” asked Harry and Rita nodded.

“Yes, Harry, thank you, that shed some interesting light on the events of the last couple of weeks,” answered Rita with a calculating smirk on her face, as she allowed Harry to go off as the Weighing the Wands began.

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After the Weighing of the Wands, where Harry’s wand checked out to be in still good working order, the time leading up to the First Task seemed to breeze by rather quickly. Harry had received a letter from Sirius, telling him to meet him by the Gryffindor Common Room fire at

midnight, the Saturday before the Tournament, which fell on Hogsmeade weekend. In the meantime, Harry, Ginny, Luna, and Neville had continued to spend most of their free time together, both training and just hanging out.

Then there was that Daily Prophet article that came out, written by Rita Skeeter, how she had taken the Ministry and Dumbledore to task about the lax security around the Goblet of Fire that allowed Harry to be entered into the Triwizard Tournament. There were more than a few howlers directed towards Dumbledore in the Great Hall, something that caused all four of them great amusement.

Hogsmeade weekend was here and Harry waited in the Common Room for Ginny. Neville and Luna had already went ahead to Hogsmeade. They would meet up with Harry and Ginny later in the day. They were going to take a side trip, sneaking out of the village and flooing straight to Diagon Alley, to head to Gringotts. Harry needed to check out his finances, to see how had on him.

“Ready to go, Harry?” asked Ginny as Harry looked up, seeing Ginny come down from the girl’s dormitory. He had been thinking how pretty she was at the oddest times over the past few weeks ever since he was spending time with her. Now, as he watched her walk towards him, Harry had thought she had never been more beautiful in her life and realized what a stupid idea robes were. She was wearing a green blouse that seemed to be a couple of inches short on her, that exposed a small deal of skin that attracted Harry’s eyes and it seemed like in her haste to get ready, she had forgotten to button a couple of the buttons. The skirt was not overly short, but it did show off her smooth, shapely legs. Adding to her flaming red hair and her beautiful brown eyes, along with the smile on her face that seemed to just enhanced her beauty, Harry found every step she took absolutely entrancing.

Ginny smiled, satisfied at the effect she was having on Harry but looking at him, she noticed that he was having a similar effect on her. He was not overly muscular, but at the same time not the scrawny person and his green eyes were extremely gorgeous, even if they still were covered with those glasses. Then that messy hair, that Ginny was tempted to run her fingers through and mess up even more.

“Wow, Ginny, you look great,” said Harry in firmly, speaking an abridged version of the thoughts that were going through his mind, some of them not very family friendly.

“Thanks Harry, you’re looking good yourself,” said Ginny with a smile, as she looked at Harry. While she was only thirteen years old, the bodies of witches matured in their teen years faster than those of their Muggle counterparts. If no one knew better, Ginny could have passed herself off as a fifteen year old at least.

“We have a lot of things to do today, we should really get going,” suggested Harry and Ginny nodded with a sigh, as the two teenagers walked off. They had business to take care of before they spent time together.

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After taking the Floo from the Three Broomsticks to the Leaky Cauldron, Harry and Ginny had made their way straight into Diagon Alley, moving towards the marble building that was Gringotts. The two had moved inside, walking into the bank that was nearly empty. Quickly, they moved right in front of a desk, where a very surly looking goblin was waiting, staring at them.

“May I help you?” asked the goblin calmly.

“Hello, I’m Harry Potter and I was wondering if I could be told exactly how much gold I have in my vault,” said Harry as him and Ginny both sat down

“Vaults, Mr. Potter,” corrected the goblin in a bored voice.

“What do you mean vaults?” asked Harry in a confused voice.

“Exactly what it should mean, Mr. Potter, vaults, it’s plural, that means you have more than one, in your case three,” recited the goblin blandly. “To be precise, the vault that you already have accessed, that was set up as a way to pay your way through Hogwarts along

with giving regular payments for your guardians for food, board, and clothing.”

“Wait, a minute, The Dursleys were getting paid for me being there,” replied Harry in a shocked voice.

“Yes, they got regular monthly payments, it was set up by your parents, no matter who you were sent to live with,” answered the goblin in a bored voice as Harry and Ginny exchanged looks of shock. The Dursleys had always told him that he was a burden, a waste of money, but yet they were being paid enough money to get him the necessities in life. Harry was almost certain that they took the money that was given to them for him and spent them on extra things for Dudley, just another thing to hate the Dursleys for. While he had not told Ginny everything, he had told her enough to see some sense of anger and was glad of his decision to keep certain aspects of his time at the Dursleys under wraps. “I’m guessing by the look on your face that they did not treat you as well as they were supposed to.”

“Yes, that’s one way of putting it,” said Harry as he felt Ginny’s hand brush against his, before grabbing it in comfort. “What about these other two vaults you’re talking about?”

“Well, there is the Potter family vault of course, since you are the last surviving member of the family, you have the right to access the gold and treasures within, no matter what the Ministry of Magic or anyone else says,” responded the goblin, basically telling Harry that Dumbledore had no right to keep him from that vault. “Then there was a vault set up shortly after you were born by your mother. Apparently, she invested all the gold she earned in a job she had during the summer months when she went to Hogwarts into several magical businesses, many quite profitable and the results are in that vault, they’re still making money as we speak. Also, there is an item that you might find of interest in that vault. She left everything to you.”

“I’d like to see what’s in Mum’s vault,” replied Harry calmly and the goblin nodded.

“Figured as much, I will send for someone to take you down to it right now and will prepare a report of all of your assets that you can pick

up on your way out,” said the goblin as Harry nodded, but Ginny looked at the goblin with a frown.

“Just one question, how is that Harry did not know about these vaults before today?” asked Ginny.

“He didn’t ask,” answered the goblin swiftly, before it craned its neck off to the side. “Corkshift!”

A goblin walked over, a business like tone on his face, as it looked at both Ginny and Harry.

“Escort Mr. Potter and his companion down to vault twelve zero one,” said the goblin and Corkshift nodded, before he motioned for Harry and Ginny to make their way into the cart. The two climbed in, Ginny allowing Harry to help her in, as they sat side by side, as the Corkshift looked towards them.

“Brace yourself and keep your hands in the cart at all times,” ordered Corkshift in a business like manner as the cart began to blast off down the straight towards the vault. There were several twists and turns and on one sharp turn, Ginny slid into Harry’s lap. Harry wrapped his arm around Ginny’s waist to hold her steady. The last thing he wanted to happen was for his friend to fall out of the cart. Harry held her tight, as Ginny leaned against his arm, legs draped over his lap, as their journey ended. Ginny slowly slid across Harry’s lap before getting to her feet, as Harry got up as well, the blood slowly returning to his head, as Corkshift walked forward, before he pressed his finger against the crack between the doorway of the vault and traced around it, causing the vault door to swing open.

Inside there was a great deal of gold and silver, that made Harry step back in awe. Between the contents of this vault and the contents his school vault, he was more than set up for life, without even factoring in the gold that was surely to be in the Potter family vault. Moving forward, Harry made his way over, spotting the only thing in the vault that was not gold, a small black box with a folded note attached to it. Moving over quickly, Harry took the note off of the box, unfolding it, before beginning to read it slowly and intently.

Dear Harry:

It might seem strange and even a bit paranoid for me to write this to you. As I speak right now, we are about to go into hiding, under the Fidelius Charm. Dumbledore is casting the charm and it appears that Peter is going to be the Secret Keeper, even though we're using Sirius as a cover to throw Voldemort off of our trail. James thinks we're going to be safe, Dumbledore assured us we were. I love your father, but he has many faults, including a blind trust of everything Dumbledore says, without bothering to formulate his own opinion at times. I hope in this instant they're both right but we can't hide forever and since you're reading this, my fears were completely justified.

James might not have the foresight to leave you a letter, just in case something happened, but if he did I'd expect he'd tell you to have fun, play Quidditch, date girls, and prank people. I tend to find myself agreeing to a certain extent, after all, what's your life worth without living it to the fullest extent?

Now some advice to actually help you survive to follow James's advice. Before you were born and the reason that we went into hiding, there was a Prophecy made. While, I don't take it as gospel, I'm afraid that Voldemort might take anything that might threaten his power rather seriously. Dumbledore had to tell us to convince me to go along with his plan and here is the prophecy, in full:

The one with the power to vanquish the Dark Lord approaches...born to those who thrice defied him born as the seventh month dies...and the Dark Lord will mark him as his equal, but he will have power that the Dark Lord knows not...and either must die at the hand of the other for neither can live while the other survives...the one with the power to vanquish the dark lord will be born as the seventh month dies.

"A Prophecy?" asked Ginny as she looked stunned, reading over Harry's shoulder, a bit of anger appearing in her eyes. "All of this, the fact that Voldemort wants to kill you, is all over a bloody Prophecy!"

"Afraid so," confirmed Harry with a sigh, as he reread the Prophecy, trying to figure out what it meant. If he was right, he was the only one

that he could defeat Voldemort and vice versa. He could see the disgusted look on Ginny's face, which indicated that she thought Divination was utterly rubbish and Harry agreed. If Voldemort had just decided not to follow along on his paranoid instincts, none of this would happen and ironically enough, Voldemort might not have been kicked out of his body.

Voldemort only knows the first line of the Prophecy. I never took Divination but reading it closely, it looks like that Voldemort might not be able to die without marking you as his equal. Even if it seems like he is finished, he will return and you need to be ready. Learn every bit of magic you can, as quickly as you can. He will have many years of experience on you, so you need everything you can. Even if said magic is questionable by the close minded standards of the Wizarding World. If people are going to turn on you for trying to ensure your survival, then they really are not worth your time anyway. Understand who your friends truly are, they will stick by you no matter what. Listen to your heart and not what people tell you is acceptable.

Also, the Wizarding World in general is broken and flawed. If you ever get the perfect opportunity, fix it, by any means necessary. Do not fall into the trap of sticking with the status quo of light and dark. Both sides are corrupt, if for different reasons.

In the box are my notes during my career as a spell creator. I stopped doing it when I married James and most of the spells in might be trivial, but if you can find anything useful in there, then I want you to have it. And remember, no matter what path you take, your father and I will both be proud of you. Don't let anyone tell you that we'd be disappointed in something that you do. Especially if that person has a long white beard and a perpetual twinkle in his eyes.

Good Luck,

Your Mother.

Harry stood, his eyes scanning over the note. Ginny remained silent, letting Harry regain his composure, as he folded up the note, before he placed it in his pocket. He then moved over, before grabbing two

sacks. Harry quickly began to fill them up with gold, before turning to hand one to Ginny.

“Harry, you don’t have to,” protested Ginny.

“I don’t have to, but I’m going to do it anyway,” replied Harry, as he placed it in Ginny’s hand. “You’re my friend Ginny, and if anyone deserves to have nice things, it’s you. It’s my way of saying thanks for coming to cheer me up when I was down after my name came out of the Goblet. It’s not charity by any means.”

Ginny opened to protest but Harry looked at her with a pleading look through his eyes. Sighing, Ginny wished Harry would not use those things on her. It gave him an unfair advantage.

“Thank you Harry, I do appreciate it, but I’d like you even if I didn’t have one knut,” answered Ginny in a defeated tone of voice which caused Harry to give her a smile that just hammered home to her how wonderful Harry was. She knew he was going to say something that would make her feel better about the entire situation.

“You don’t have to tell me Ginny, I know but I can sense your discomfort that you might not get nice things because your family’s financial situation,” answered Harry. “It doesn’t matter to me, but if I can help out in any way, I’ll be happy to.”

Ginny responded by throwing her arms around Harry, hugging him in a gesture of thanks. Harry slipped his arms around her, the gesture feeling warm and encouraging, actually giving him room to breath, not crushing his ribs. They broke apart, before they returned the cart as if nothing out of the ordinary had happened. Corkshift allowed them to get into the cart as they road back up to the top of the bank where the goblin that had met him at the top, holding a sheet of parchment.

“There you are, Mr. Potter, the tallies for all three of your vaults, I think you’d be very pleased, considering your overall balance has more zeroes in it than Wizengamot session,” answered the goblin smoothly, as he handed Harry the parchment as the two climbed out of the cart, Harry’s eyes widened, as he looked at the amount of money that he available.

That sure was a lot of gold.

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They spent the next few hours in Diagon Alley. While Harry had only planned to go there to take a look at his finances at Gringotts, Ginny convinced to go shopping for all new clothes, by turning Harry's logic that he used on her about deserving nice things back on him. Being a boy, he was disinterested in shopping for clothes, but Ginny helped make the experience rather painless. She did have good taste and after that, Harry went to an optical store in Diagon Alley to get contact lenses. As Ginny had bluntly pointed out, if he lost his glasses or they were broken during a duel, he was screwed. The contacts were nothing fancy, but would adjust for changes in his eyes and he would never have to clean them.

Right now, after the impromptu shopping trip had concluded, which would have been much more painful if Ginny had not been with him, they settled down at Florean Fortescue's ice cream parlor. They had not gotten a chance to eat lunch and Harry would need to take his nutrient replenishing potion on a full stomach anyway. Ginny returned with their ice creams, sitting down, sliding Harry's ice cream over towards him.

"Don't worry Harry, I paid for it, the least I can do," remarked Ginny, before Harry could say anything.

"Thanks, Ginny," replied Harry, as he watched to lean across the table, to get a spoon for her ice cream, not being able to help where his eyes had shifted. Sure there were dozens of other beautiful girls in the Gryffindor house alone, but there was something amazing about Ginny, that had just made her even more beautiful in his eyes. He took a bite of his ice cream, she was his friend, but Harry was beginning to see that she had the potential to be more.

"Harry, is something wrong?" asked Ginny, frowning, Harry did seem to be in deep concentration about something. Slowly, Harry turned his eyes towards Ginny and Ginny wondered if she should have bought a stick when she was here, to beat off all of the girls that would throw

themselves at Harry. She knew she was exercising every bit of self control she had not to grab him and kiss him madly, not wanting to scare him off by one impulsive action

"Thinking about the letter, Mum left for me," answered Harry evasively, before he leaned in close so Ginny could only hear him. "It's almost like she's encouraging me to overthrow both sides and reform the Wizarding World in my own image."

"Really, you're not the only one that got that impression," said Ginny with a thoughtful look. "I don't know, but we do have to prepare for Voldemort, all of us, we need to let Neville and Luna in on it later too, but now we have to worry about preparing. Because, he did try to come back, twice, and who knows how many more times we don't know of. One of his tries might actually work. We'll worry about overthrowing the Ministry later."

"Good point, Ginny," agreed Harry in between bites of his ice cream, not knowing if Ginny was being serious or not with her last statement. It did make him smile and Harry would have to step up his efforts to learn magic several notches to even have a fighting chance to beat Voldemort. "More trips inside the Restricted Section, maybe under the cover of the Invisibility Cloak at night. This time if a book starts screaming, we know silencing charms, so we can shut it up."

Ginny laughed at the reference of Harry's first time under the Invisibility Cloak. Both of the teenagers completed their ice cream. Harry completed his nutrient replenishing potion, before checking his watch. His eyes widened when he saw the time, it was several hours past the time where students were due to return to Hogsmeade.

"Ginny, do you realize that we missed meeting up with Neville and Luna, it's almost six at night?" asked Harry in an alarmed voice.

"They're understand, we'll just tell them that your business at Gringotts ran longer than we thought," said Ginny in a reassuring tone of voice, slowly licking some stray ice cream off of her fingers, as she remembered Luna telling her that the two of them would meet up with her and Harry. That was if Ginny and Harry did not get sidetracked.

They returned to take the Floo back to the Three Broomsticks where they would sneak back into Hogwarts under the Invisibility Cloak.

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After checking to see that the coast was clear, Harry and Ginny took one of the passageways back to Hogwarts. It had lead from a broom closet in the back of the Three Broomsticks to underneath the bleachers at Hogwarts. The two made their way from underneath the bleachers and the sight that greeted them took them aback.

"Dragons," gasped Ginny in shock as she looked forward to see four dragons being moved into the field by dragon handlers, as Harry's eyes widened, his mind inventing explanations for their presence, none of them too soothing but he came to one grim conclusion

"You don't think..." stated Harry after finding his voice.

"I sure hope not," replied Ginny in an alarmed voice as her eyes watched one of the dragons shoot fire from the Quidditch Field that passed over the trees to the Forbidden Forest.

"They are," concluded Harry dismally.

"You've got to be kidding me!" shouted Ginny hotly, before Harry gently clapped his hand over her mouth to provide a further angry outburst that would attract the attention of the dragon handlers. The two cautiously took a few steps forward, to be able to hear better. Ginny spotted Charlie in the distance and Hagrid as well. They were close enough to hear a bit of what they were saying.

"So, what do you have to do?" asked Hagrid. "Fight 'em."

"No, nothing like that, just get past them, get a golden egg if I'm not mistaken," answered Charlie in a low, serious tone of voice. "They wanted us to bring in nesting mothers, if you could believe that."

Harry felt Ginny gasp from behind his hand at the words "nesting mothers" and fear filled her face. Slowly, Harry removed his hand from her mouth.

“Ginny, nesting mother dragons, I’m guessing it’s not a pleasant thing to be even near them,” muttered Harry, searching for an explanations.

“Considering how they’ve been known to tear apart dragons much larger than they are just for looking at their eggs wrong, yes, Harry, this is very bad,” answered Ginny as she grabbed onto Harry’s arm, her knees were a bit wobbly. “I don’t know how they could even consider this Tournament to be safe for people that are of age, much less someone who does not have a full magical education. What were they thinking?”

“I’m going to be okay,” replied Harry trying to reassure himself as much as Ginny. “I fought a Basilisk, remember?”

“Yes, you did, but these things are much worse, especially the Horntails, I remember Charlie mentioned it one time,” said Ginny in a terrified voice, as her eyes watched the dragons shoot fire and one of them began to get out of control. It began to go on a rampage and it took a team of eight wizards shooting three rounds of stunning spells before it was brought to its knees and another round to put it to sleep.

Harry watched it as well, seeing the scorched field, as they backed off, before they moved back towards the school. He saw Karkaroff lurking in the shadows as they went back to Hogwarts and Madam Maxime was with Hagrid, so he figured he better give Cedric the heads up. After all, he had helped Harry dodge a bullet, in an indirect way.

Right now, he needed to get up to the castle and make sure the Gryffindor Common Room was cleared out, as Sirius would be contacting him shortly.

Longer chapter in execution than it was in my head. Next Chapter, Sirius, last minute preparations, First Task, and a confrontation that has been brewing for the past four chapters.

And before anyone asks, the official Harry/Ginny trigger will be pulled soon.

Chapter Five: Dragon:

Harry and Ginny made their way up towards the Gryffindor Common Room, with Harry's scheduled meeting with Sirius fast approaching. Ginny looked a little bit shaken at seeing the dragons and quite frankly, Harry was not feeling all that well himself. The fact that he only had to get a golden egg away from a dragon instead of fighting it really did not help after he learned that nesting mothers tore anyone threatening their eggs to shreds. Even other dragons that might even be much larger than they are and Harry would much down they would even bother telling the difference of a golden egg from a regular egg.

Harry also had the letter he received from his mother on his mind and also what he found about Gringotts about the Dursleys actually receiving money to care for him. Now that he was over the shock of finding that out, Harry decided that he would have to make a return trip soon enough, maybe over the Christmas holidays, so he could see if he could stop the payments and perhaps recover all of the gold that was given to the Dursleys. Harry was angry when he thought how many of Dudley's birthday and Christmas presents must have been bought using his gold.

As for finding out that Dumbledore might have known that his parents switched Secret Keepers, well that was typical. The problem with this was that while this might have cleared Sirius on the charge of being the Secret Keeper, it did not clear him of the murder charges. Unless he found Wormtail, the Ministry would still believe that Sirius killed Wormtail and also all of those Muggles, even though the reasoning was slightly different. That was, if he could get the Ministry to believe that Dumbledore knew of the switch all along. As much as Harry hated to admit it, his mother's word would mean very little when held up against Dumbledore's. She was a muggleborn witch after all but right about one thing. The Wizarding World needed to be fixed, both sides, but it was where to start that lead to much confusion for Harry.

The Prophecy, it just meant Harry would have to study even harder than he was for the Tournament and practice more advanced magic. He was coming to the conclusion that he might need to learn all he could about dark magic, not just the defense of it. Voldemort was not going to use stunning spells and fully body binds if they ever got into

a duel, he was going to go straight for the lethal and dangerous magic. Harry knew that people would turn on him even more if he was willingly studying dark magic, but he also knew that his friends would stick by him. Those people who would brand him as evil for doing what was necessary, he could do without and in fact, it was one of the reasons why the Wizarding World was so broken.

“Harry?” prompted Ginny as they passed the Portrait Hole and moved into the Gryffindor Common Room. “I’m going to put charms on the exits for the dormitories, but I think it might be a good idea if I stand watch as well, under the Cloak. Can never be too careful.”

“Thanks, Ginny,” said Harry graciously, before he lifted the Cloak slightly, so he could move forward. Looking around the Common Room, it was empty and checking the map confirmed it. Other than Ginny moving around, everyone appeared to be in their beds.

Harry looked forward, watching the fire as it began to cackle to life and the face of Sirius began to form right in the fire. Had Harry not seen Mr. Diggory’s head in the fire when he stayed at the Burrow, he would have given a bit of a jump.

“Good evening Harry,” said Sirius as he looked at Harry. “How have you been lately?”

“Good enough Sirius,” answered Harry with a sigh. “This entire Tournament mess has been a bit trying on my nerves but at least my friends have been here to support me through the entire thing.”

“Yes, I’m sure, how are Ron and Hermione doing anyway?” asked Sirius and Harry just suddenly sighed.

“I wouldn’t know, I really haven’t spoken to them since the entire mess with the Goblet of Fire went down,” answered Harry swiftly as Sirius looked at him from the fire with a raised eyebrow “Yeah, they believe I put my name into the Goblet of Fire.”

“After all you’ve been through, they believed you would do something like that!” cried Sirius in an alarmed voice as he looked at Harry, he seemed about as upset as Harry did about Ron and Hermione’s

recent attitude problems. "Both of them, I thought you said your friends were..."

"They are, I have real friends now, Sirius," said Harry. "It was tough to wrap my head around at first, believe me but now it's for the best. My grades are improving, I've never been happier in my life, and it might have been a lot better that I cut ties with them. For all I know, they could have pulled a Wormtail at the wrong possible time."

"Yes, that's true Harry, but the thing is, there was no signs that pointed to the fact that Wormtail had sold out to Voldemort," answered Sirius. "I mean, during our years at Hogwarts, he never showed any sign that he would ever go that way. Afterwards as well, perhaps he was more cunning than we would ever give him credit for or perhaps he just changed. Otherwise, I would not have made the suggestion to switch him with me for the Secret Keeper."

"Too true, I do wonder the real reason why Wormtail turned the way he did," mused Harry thoughtfully. "But that's not important right now, you did say you had some things that you needed to tell me face to face."

"Of course I do Harry," said Sirius seriously. "The thing is, you really do need to be on your guard. Karkaroff, the Durmstrang Headmaster, he was a Death Eater."

"That's an interested piece of news," answered Harry with a raise of his eyebrow.

"Yes one of his most fanatical ones too, that is, until Voldemort fell and he turned stool pigeon," responded Sirius. "He did not have the gold to bargain his way out of Azkaban by claiming the Imperius Curse, so he turned tail and ratted out some of Voldemort's followers. Threw quite a few into Azkaban if I remember rightly and they're none too happy about Karkaroff. They feel he's a traitor, only slightly under Wormtail on the scale of people they hate that were Death Eaters."

"And if he put my name into the Goblet of Fire and got me killed, the person who brought Voldemort down in the first place, he might think

he would be forgiven,” responded Harry thoughtfully and Sirius nodded.

“That’s exactly my assumption as well, Harry,” said Sirius. “He’s a prime suspect if nothing else, so be ready for anything.”

“Right, thanks Sirius, I will, I’ve been training, both to survive the tasks themselves and the person who put me in this entire mess in the first place,” said Harry. “Tonight, I just found out what the first task was, dragons. Apparently, I have to get past them and get a golden egg, so any advice so I don’t get barbequed out there.”

“Right, dragons, of course,” said Sirius as he was deep in thought. “Most spells won’t do you any good, especially a direct attack. The dragon’s hide is thick and tough to crack. It would take many wizards to even stun it.”

“Yes, eight of them, three rounds of stunning spells before it even dropped it out there,” agreed Harry. “Is there a weak point?”

“The eyes Harry, that’s where you might have to target,” answered Sirius. “The trouble is that it might just cause the dragon to become more agitated, even if their eyes are damaged. The best advice would be that you would somehow slip in and get the egg, without bothering the dragon, but I suppose that’s asking for a miracle.”

“Yes, that might be,” agreed Harry. “Thanks Sirius, I’m sure we’ll think of something but is there anything else?”

“No, I best be getting going, I broke into a house to use the family’s fire, they could be back at any moment, so unless you have anything else to tell me, I’ll see you later,” said Sirius.

“I do, but not here, wait until the next time we meet up in person but that’s not a request to sneak into Hogwarts when you are a wanted fugitive,” said Harry sternly, who would have loved to tell his godfather more of what he found out, but he did not put it past Dumbledore to be monitoring the fires. Right now, Harry wanted Dumbledore to believe that he was still under the Headmaster’s thumb, until he was in a position where he could cut all ties without

Dumbledore having the leverage to say anything to say about it. That would be a long term project.

“Okay, Harry,” said Sirius in a confused voice. “I suppose this is good bye until next time.”

“Good night, Sirius,” responded Harry as he watched Sirius disappear from the fire. Once Sirius had disappeared from the fire, Harry walked over to where Ginny was standing. She removed the Invisibility Cloak and handed it to Harry.

“We’ll worry about everything in the morning, Harry,” responded Ginny in a logical tone of voice, before yawning. “Right now we should really get some sleep, I have a feeling that it’s going to be a rough next few days before the next task.”

“Good idea, good night Ginny,” replied Harry, as he reached forward, hugging Ginny, catching her off guard. This was the first time that Harry had initiated a hug but she returned it, holding each other for a couple of minutes before they broke apart.

“Night Harry, pleasant dreams,” responded Ginny sleepily, but happily as she made her way up, cancelling the charms before she did.

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“So where have you been, Harry?” asked Luna in a curious voice, as he had just entered the unused classroom on Sunday afternoon about an hour after lunch, with Luna, Ginny, and Neville.

“Got held up, I told Diggory about the dragons, and Moody saw me, invited me into his office,” answered Harry.

“You didn’t get into trouble, did you?” asked Ginny in a concerned voice.

“No, I did not, he said that cheating’s a part of the Triwizard and said that Maxime and Karkaroff would be likely to tell their champions anyway,” said Harry. “Anyway, we talked and he actually, in a roundabout way, gave me a way that might help me get past the

dragon. He hinted that it might be a good idea to use a summoning charm to get my Firebolt and fly around, before getting the golden egg.”

“Are you sure that’s a good idea?” asked Neville. “I know you’re good on a broomstick, but they can shoot fire very far and are quick, you’d still have to get in really close to get the egg and the dragons...well they might not like that too much.”

“Neville’s right Harry, it might get you in, but there’s a good chance that you could be hurt the moment you get near the eggs,” responded Ginny with a frown, as she was thinking. “The summoning charm is a good start though, but maybe instead of summoning the broom, you should summon the egg.”

“They might have thought about that though,” argued Neville. “Objects can be charmed against summoning, otherwise you could just summon anything you wanted without even paying for it. The egg would be no different, it just seems too easy.”

“Does it?” asked Luna thoughtfully. “Would they even see the possibility that a champion would just summon the egg? I mean, the Wizarding World, for the most part, they really do not see the easiest situation. Everything has to be convoluted. I think it’s highly likely that the section of the brain is blocked by an infestation of Wrackspurts. The Ministry should really worry about them, instead of werewolves, they are far more of a threat, most of the stupidity that plagues the Ministry of Magic is caused by them and their ability to make minds go fuzzy.”

Neville, Ginny, and Harry just exchanged looks. Most times, Luna did seem almost sane, but there were times where she went off on strange tangents.

“Right, so I suppose summoning the egg might be an idea,” said Harry. “On the chance it does not work, I’ll go with Moody’s idea and hope that I don’t get burned to a crisp.”

“Until then, we really need to look into fire repelling charms, put them on your clothing,” answered Ginny. “Don’t know how much good they’d do against a dragon...”

“Any good is good enough for me,” answered Harry and with that, they cleared away the desks and began practicing spells. They tried to focus on long distance casting on the spells they learned, which was very limited in a classroom. Still it was a vital and often overlooked part of dueling, so Harry felt it would add another advantage, to keep himself out of the line of fire, while being able to fight any enemy.

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Time had seemed to move annoyingly fast pace, as the First Task of the Triwizard Tournament. Harry was ready for the dragon or at least as ready as he would ever be. He had been spending a bit of time over the past couple of days attempting to perfect Occlumency. The books were not lying, it was not a branch of magic that was mastered immediately, but Harry had some rudimentary skills that would help protect his thoughts, providing he did not look someone in an eye for too long.

He had also found something extremely odd as he shifted through his mind. A strange cluster of thoughts and memories that was most certainly not his own. They all seemed to be centered close by his scar. When he tried to tap into this section of his mind, all Harry felt was a stabbing pain in his scar and could gather nothing. He wondered if this foreign cluster of memories was connected to all those vivid dreams he was having that involved Voldemort. Whatever it was, Harry was trying to figure out a way to remove it. The book had mentioned about removing blocks that had been caused by memory charms, which was a painful process, but something about this cluster seemed more powerful than a simple memory charm. It was almost like he had a piece of Voldemort in his mind but that thought was quite frankly rather disturbing.

Then again, Dumbledore said that Voldemort had unwillingly transferred some of his powers to Harry on that Halloween night. It could have been even more than even Dumbledore would have

thought. For now, Harry worked to isolate that foreign section of his mind from the rest of it.

Harry was just completing breakfast. His mind was focused on the dragon right now, visualizing his victory in his hand. His robes were currently charmed to both repel fire and coated in Floo Powder. After all, if it allowed people to travel through fire without being burned, it should give him some protection from the dragons.

“Mr. Potter,” said Professor McGonagall causing Harry to turn around to face his strict Head of House. “I am to inform you that the champions are to be to the tent outside of the Quidditch Field within the next fifteen minutes where Mr. Bagman will give them instructions.”

“Thanks, Professor, I’m going to head right there straight away,” said Harry.

“Good luck, Harry” said Ginny quietly, even after all the preparation, Harry could still see she was a bit worried for him and he would be lying if he was still not a bit worried himself. “We’ll see you after the task is over.

“Yeah Harry, don’t worry, you can do it,” said Neville and Luna just waved at him from the Ravenclaw table, as Harry followed McGonagall from the Great Hall through the exits of Hogwarts.

“Just be calm Potter, don’t lose your head, and everything will turn out fine,” responded McGonagall in an encouraging voice. “Good luck.”

“Thanks, Professor,” said Harry as McGonagall watched him leave, thinking about what she had witnessed over the past month. She would have been a fool not to have noticed the current falling out between Harry and his friends. It was strange, most students had their grades fall once they had disagreements with long time friends yet Harry’s had improved dramatically. While he was nowhere near Hermione’s level, the gap was narrowing between the two students.

Harry walked towards the tent, where Ludo Bagman was standing there, with a cartoonish expression on his face.

“Ah, the youngest champion, good Harry, sit down, everything that you need to know will be explained in a few minutes,” announced Bagman cheerfully. He had a good reason to be happy, he was not about to face off against a dragon. He walked in, seeing the other three champions sitting around in the tent, in various states of distress. The theory about them knowing about the dragons was right on the mark.

For a minute or so, all four of the champions sat, as Bagman moved around, to turn to them.

“Great, now that you’re all here, we can begin preparing for the First Task, it should be a rather straight forward affair, first we need to draw for the order of what you’re going to have to face off against,” stated Bagman, as he held out a drawstring bag. “There are different varieties in this bag, with the number around their neck stating when your turn would be, some a bit tougher to deal with than others, but all should test your abilities to compete well. Should be a fun time, shouldn’t it?”

Harry thought about saying something snarky, but decided against it, as the other three champions began to draw their dragons. He did not really pay much attention to what was going on around him, after all, it only mattered what he had to face. After the other three drew, Bagman held the bag to Harry. Reaching inside, Harry had withdrawn a small Hungarian Horntail with a number four around its neck.

“Oh of course,” muttered Harry as he rolled his eyes at his discovery, as he looked, it was obvious that he would have to deal with the most ferocious dragon of the lot. He just hoped the easy way worked because he did not relish getting close to a dragon that dangerous.

“Harry, a word for a moment if you please,” said Bagman as he waved Harry over, and Harry followed him, to see what this was all about. “Now Harry, you do have a game plan right, a strategy, a way to get past the dragon? Because if you don’t, I can give you a couple of pointers that will make it easier on you.”

"I've got a plan and a backup plan, Mr. Bagman, I think I'll do fine," responded Harry confidently.

"Are you sure Harry?" asked Bagman and Harry could not help by noticing that Bagman seemed awfully intent on helping him. It was almost like he had something riding on the Tournament and for a brief second, Harry had wondered if Bagman had put his name in the Goblet of Fire. He shook his head that thought as absurd.

"Fine, Mr. Bagman, I'm sure," responded Harry firmly and a whistle was heard in the background. It was obvious the signal that the Tournament was about to begin and Bagman quickly bolted from the tent, as fast his legs could carry him. Harry sat back down with the other champions, preparing for himself, visualizing his triumph in the task at hand.

The other three champions went out one by one. Despite his desire not to hear anything that would interfere with his concentration, he could still hear bits and pieces of commentary and noise from outside that painted far worse pictures than he might have seen had he been out there watching. A blood curdling shriek by Fleur which was followed by gasps from the crowd had been the worst. Harry questioned the wisdom of having dragons be a part of this task more and more, as he sat there. He just shuddered, at what could come next in the Tournament with the other two tasks

After what was most likely an hour in between the other three champions, Harry heard the call for him to come forward. Bracing himself, Harry walked from the tent slowly, wand in hand. He could see the crowd looking eager. Some of them were excited to see what Harry had in store for beating the dragon, what powerful bit of magic that he had in store for his victory. Others were looking eager for less benevolent reasons, especially a good majority of the Slytherin house. Not all of them, but a good lot of them looked like they wanted to see Harry burst into flames right before their very eyes. Harry would say he would hate to disappoint him, but that would be a lie.

Standing a great distance away from the dragon, Harry watched the beast narrow its eyes towards him. She snorted flames, looking at

Harry, almost daring him to take a step forward. Harry held his wand in place, as the crowd rose to their feet, looking forward to what Harry had in store.

“And now Harry Potter is in position!” shouted Bagman’s amplified voice, over the noise of the crowd. “The youngest champion looks ready to dazzle us with some great feat of magic, it appears that he is ready to show us that he belongs in this Tournament.”

“Accio golden egg,” stated Harry clearly and the egg lifted from the nest, before it zoomed right towards Harry. The dragon gave a surprised snarl but relaxed, when it realized the golden egg did not belong with her other eggs. The egg soared right into the hands of Harry, who caught it, the crowd in shock. Harry looked at the egg, a bit of a surprised expression over his face, at the fact that the logical plan of attack in getting the egg worked. “Well, I’ll be damned.”

The crowd looked stunned and Bagman was silent. The other judges were looking at each other, wondering how they could have missed such an obvious thing as charming the golden egg against summoning. Harry guessed that the other champions would be cursing themselves when they found out how easily he had gotten the egg.

“Well, Harry Potter has gotten the egg in record time by er summoning it, so I guess he’s passed the first task,” said Bagman after finding his voice and Harry was shocked to hear some boos from the crowd, obviously upset that Harry had gotten the egg in such a manner. Harry felt a burst of anger at them, he was just a tool for their own entertainment to them. He made his way back to the first aid tent, where Madam Pomfrey was waiting for him, a bit of a surprised expression on her face.

“You are the last person I would expect to get through this awful task without getting one scratch,” responded Madam Pomfrey after regaining her composure as she looked over Harry. “Just sit for a moment, and you can go out and get your scores momentarily, I need to check on others that were not as lucky.”

Harry sat down, the Golden Egg in one hand, as he heard footsteps coming. Neville, Luna, and Ginny entered the tent, looking relieved that Harry was safe. Harry got up, as Ginny rushed over him. For a brief second, their lips brushed together, having the same impulsive thought, but they broke apart when they realized what they were doing.

"I'm sorry!" yelled both Ginny and Harry in unison, as they looked at each other with perplexed and slightly frightened looks on their faces. "What are you sorry for? I was the one that..."

"So, it actually worked Harry," said Neville in an attempt to break the moment of awkward silence, but Luna just cleared her throat with a knowing expression on her face.

"Neville, it might be a good idea if we step out for a couple of minutes, I'm thinking Harry and Ginny might need some time alone," said Luna and Neville had picked up the hint, as he walked off, leaving Harry and Ginny standing right across from each other.

"Harry, I suppose we could pretend that didn't happen, but it wouldn't be a good idea," responded Ginny.

"Who says I wanted to?" asked Harry, as he took a step forward, towards Ginny, grabbing her hands, they fit perfectly in his. "In fact, I think we can both do better the second time around."

Ginny nodded numbly, before she and Harry embraced and they pressed their lips against each other. This time it was not a quick, impulsive action in the heat of the moment, it was an actual kiss. She liked him, he liked her, this is what they both wanted, they got to know each other pretty well, why wait around and waste time?

Harry felt pure bliss, her scent, her taste, her beauty. It was all intoxicating to him and he had never wanted anything more in his life than to please Ginny and to be with her. He slowly eased his tongue into her mouth, as he quickly put his hands on the back of her neck, feeling the smooth skin, running his fingers across it. Ginny gave a small moan in pleasure, as Harry's tongue worked its way into the inside of her mouth and she returned the favor, along with placing her

hands on Harry's hair, running her hands through it, causing it to stick up even more in all directions. As she pressed tighter against Harry, Ginny could feel that something other than Harry's hair was beginning to stand up. She also felt Harry's hands starting to work themselves inside her robes.

Harry and Ginny broke apart, not because of any desire to not go any further, but because of footsteps that they heard. They turned to face the entrance of the tent, with Ron and Hermione standing right in front of them, with apologetic looks on their face.

"Yes," said Ginny, who seemed very annoyed of having her alone time with Harry interrupted, as Ron and Hermione looked at each other, before they turned to Harry and Ginny.

"Listen Harry, about the Goblet of Fire, now that I've had some time to think about it, I believe that you didn't put your name in," said Ron nervously, as Harry and Ginny just looked at him without blinking. "Someone might be trying to do you in."

"Really, brilliant deduction, Ron," said Harry in an irritated tone of voice, as he grabbed Ginny's hand.

"Harry, we're wrong, there's no way you could have put your name in the Goblet of Fire, we're sorry," pleaded Hermione.

"So, after a month, you decided that you were wrong about the Goblet," responded Harry coldly.

"Yes, we did, now you need to forgive us," said Hermione. "We're your friends, you need us..."

"Friends, is that what you are?" asked Harry in a dangerous voice. "I need you. Is that what you think? You think I need you, is that what I'm hearing?"

"Come on Harry, you do need us," answered Hermione in a slightly smug tone of voice. "I mean, all those times you could have gotten yourself killed, we helped you. You can't live without us."

"Yeah, I guess I do need you, I mean, you two did save us from a hundred Dementors," responded Harry in a sarcastic tone of voice. "Oh wait, that's was me. Or the fact you fought a basilisk. No wait, that was me, again. Oh, I suppose I can't count you out for the fact you fought Voldemort two times since you went to Hogwarts. Wait a minute, that was me again."

"You know, you're being very ungrateful," said Hermione in a tone of voice that indicated she thought that Harry was in the wrong and Ron took a step back, thinking that Hermione was ruining any chance to mend their friendship with Harry.

"You ever look in the mirror recently, Hermione?" questioned Harry and Hermione's eyes flashed with anger, before she rushed forward and slapped Harry right across the face. Before Harry had a chance to react, he saw a red haired blur pass him, and Ginny's fist connected with Hermione's face. Hermione was backed off, dropping her wand in her surprise, as her arms and legs snapped together, before Ginny grabbed her by the hair, shoving the older girl against the magically reinforced wall of the tent, before putting her wand at Hermione's throat, hand trembling.

"You ever so much as touch Harry ever again, you won't get off as easily," hissed Ginny dangerously, as a fearful look appeared in Hermione's eyes, as she trapped in the full body bind. "You should be ashamed of yourself, and now you expect Harry to be the one to apologize to you, to come back to you. Both of you, you turned your back on Harry, when he needed you the most and now think you can be taken back just like that. You must be bent to think Harry or for that matter, anyone else with a brain, would forgive you that easily."

"Ginny's summed up my feelings," responded Harry, as he looked at Hermione's face, some swelling underneath her right eye, along with the beginnings of a black eye. "You two blew it, I never had any friends before Hogwarts and I trusted you with all my life. You took that trust and abused it. I can never forgive either of you ever. Both of you can just think about what you've ruined and what you will never get back."

Ginny cancelled the full body bind on Hermione, who seemed shocked and angered, but Harry was not done with her, as he removed a badge from his pocket.

“And, I’m not going to be apart of your futile attempt to free house elves any more,” said Harry as he shoved the badge in Hermione’s hand roughly. “And did you think I would be stupid enough to not see that you were using my name without my permission to recruit members to your little club? You are going to go to every member that you got to join by using my name and offer them a refund or I’ll go straight to McGonagall. I doubt she would be pleased with what you’ve done. Do you understand me, Granger?”

“Yes,” said Hermione tearfully as her face continued to swell, but Harry did not feel sorry for her at all.

“Er, Harry,” stated Ron awkwardly, not sure if he wanted to speak in the mood that Ginny and Harry were in, based on what Hermione did. In fact, he was not too happy himself. She ruined his chances to apologize to Harry. “Bagman wants to give the champions instructions, you should report out there right now and you’re in first place, only a couple of points ahead of Krum. Congratulations, I guess.”

Harry nodded stiffly, not bothering to even dignify Ron by even looking him, as him and Ginny left the tent hand in hand, together, as both Ron and Hermione remained alone

“I told you using Harry’s name to recruit members for spew was a bad idea,” remarked Ron.

“SHUT UP RON!” snapped Hermione angrily, before wincing. The area where Ginny’s fist connected with her face still hurt.

I did not expect to get this chapter done this weekend, but managed to squeeze it in. I would say not to expect anything until the middle of next week at the earliest, but you never know. Until then, hope you enjoyed this one.

Chapter Six: Meeting

The aftermath of the First Task of the Triwizard Tournament gave Harry a fair bit of amusement. He could hear the mutterings from many people in the school, stating that he had cheated to get the egg to win the first task. Harry shook his head when he heard these people. He simply just exploited the stupidity of those involved in setting up the task. How was it his fault that they did not charm the egg against summoning? As much as he hated to admit Hermione being right about something, she was correct when she said wizards had no sense of logic. Otherwise, Harry would not have been able to get through the task as easily and unharmed as well.

As for the Golden Egg, well it held the clue to the next task in the Tournament, as Bagman had indicated. Harry had been busy with classes all day, but he made plans to get together with his friends, so they could work out the clue together. Then, it would give Harry three months to figure out a way to exploit any flaws in the next task.

Right now, he was outside of the Charms classroom, waiting for Ginny to leave. Harry spotted her walking around the corner from the exit and moved forward. He opened his mouth to greet her but Ginny apparently had already seen him coming, meeting him fully on the lips with a kiss. Harry was surprised, but he quickly and very eagerly managed to return to the gesture, as Ginny quickly guided them behind a tapestry before anyone else could come along and spoil the moment. They kissed for several minutes, minutes that were all too short, but the unfortunate necessity of having to breathe came up.

"Wow, Ginny," said Harry as he finally caught his breath, they had only been together as a couple for a short time, but she still never failed to amaze him. "I was planning on surprising you but..."

"I know, I kind of spoiled it but it worked out in the end very well," said Ginny as she gripped Harry's hand, with a smile, as they walked down the hallway, as Harry checked the Marauder's Map to make sure no one was coming. Sure enough there was no one. "Today seemed like an eternity without you, Harry."

"Same here, Ginny," answered Harry as they walked down the hallway, enjoying each other's company, remembering the first kiss that they shared after the First Task. If only Ron and Hermione did not interrupt, he wondered how far they would have went. Probably as far as Ginny would have allowed, but considering she had about as little self control as he did, that might not have been the most responsible guideline.

"We have a lot to do," remarked Ginny.

"I know, Neville and Luna will be meeting us at the usual spot, I've got the egg in my bag, and we have a few more things we need to go over including Mum's notes before we can get onto more desirable things," remarked Harry.

"Right, Harry, I understand, but until then.." said Ginny, before she grabbed Harry and he allowed her to gently pushed him against the wall before pressing her lips against his, Harry returning the favor, feeling wonderful at the sensation of having Ginny's body pressed against his. Stepping back a few inches, slowly, brushing her fingers playfully across Harry's chest as she did, Ginny slowly broke the kiss. "This will have to do."

"For now," agreed Harry, as he could still taste Ginny's cherry lipstick on his mouth but he became focused. There would be plenty of time for them later, but right now, there would be work to do. Ginny was amazing, Harry was hard pressed to imagine his life without her. Most boys would be intimidated to date a girl that had six older brothers, but Harry felt that him and Ginny could take them.

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"I for one am looking forward to what the clue is inside that egg," remarked Luna.

"Well it can't be anything good," answered Neville. "If dragons were the first task, then who knows what will be in the second task. I don't think it will be anything good."

“Yes, I’m afraid you’re right Neville,” said Harry grimly, as he lifted the golden egg up.

“Ready when you are Harry,” encouraged Ginny and Harry nodded, before he took the golden and without any other word, pried it open. The moment it opened, a loud, screeching appeared, that caused the four friends to clap their hands over their ears, moaning in absolute pain. The noise was unbearable, not too different from nails on a chalkboard.

“Shut it, please,” said Neville in a pained voice, as Harry did not have to be told twice, as he shut the egg, with a pained expression.

“Okay, will you explain to me what that was supposed to be,” said Harry, as he massaged his ears, they were still quite sore. “I have no idea.”

“That makes two of us Harry,” replied Ginny with a frown. “I’ve never heard anything that horrid in my life.”

“Maybe we’re approaching this problem at the wrong angle, maybe it’s not something meant to be heard through the medium of air,” suggested Luna. “Or maybe it’s not something that human ears are not meant to pick up on? Any number of things.”

“No, the first explanation might work,” answered Harry, putting his hand to his chin, thinking quickly. “Under the water, are there creatures that can only be heard under water?”

“Mer-people,” replied Luna dreamingly. “And there just happens to be a colony right in the Hogwarts Lake.”

“So, you might have to get past them to get something else,” said Neville and Harry nodded, so far that’s how it was appearing to him.

“I don’t think the same trick might work twice, but we have to actually hear what’s inside the egg before I make a plan,” said Harry, as he looked at the egg. “I think if the egg is put under water and opened there, we could understand it. Then I’ll know what exactly the Second Task is.”

“Good, we’ll have to do that later,” said Ginny, as Harry put the egg back into his bag and removed the small black box that contained the notes from his mother’s vault. Harry opened the box, wondering what was inside. The others helped him go through the notes. For the most part at first they just seemed to be relatively simple charms but as they delved deeper, there were some creations that did have their uses. It was nothing that could wipe out all of the world’s problems in a single stroke. However, there were some useful gems that could be used later.

“Look at this one, a charm to link multiple pieces of parchment together, allowing notes to be sent that only the intended recipient can read,” read Harry. “It also dissolves the moment you have read them, leaving the parchment blank for further messages.”

“Yes, that would be useful, it wouldn’t be intercepted by someone that way,” said Neville.

“Well don’t be so sure, apparently, Mum never finished her work on the spell, it says that the messages only work when they are sent within the same dwelling, says the messages get lost otherwise” said Harry. “So for right now, we’re only stuck with using them inside the castle.”

“That might be something we need to come back to later on,” said Luna. “Owls are nice, but they can get misdirected and they take time to get to their destination. It seems to be its almost instantaneous.”

“Correct Luna,” agreed Harry as he looked it over. “It’s not like something that is going to replace owl post or anything. The charms required to create the link require a fair bit of power to pull off.”

“We’ll make it work eventually, if we really sit down and look at your mother’s notes, we might be able to find something that she missed to get it work long distance,” said Ginny. “It’d be nice to have something like that to write quickly over the summer or if we’re in trouble.”

“As I said, we’ll go back to that later, let’s see what else we got,” answered Harry as he looked through the notes.

“Retrievable Portkey charms,” muttered Luna as she flipped over the parchment as the others looked at her. “Place them on a portkey and add a password and you can activate the Portkey, along with anyone holding it by just saying the password, no matter what the distance is. It’s not something that anyone could do, a lot of tricky and very precise spell work.”

“Does it bypass anti-Portkey spells?” asked Harry and Luna shook her head. “Well, I was thinking we might place those charms on an object that we would wear at all times, as an emergency measure if we are missing for too long. Still, it might not do us that much good if there are anti-Portkey spells placed around the area.”

“And if there aren’t, then it would be useful,” said Ginny in a reasonable voice. “As we’ve see with the first task of the Triwizard, sometimes people don’t take the most logical measures to prevent something from happening.”

“We’ll put that on the to-do list then and come back to it later on when we’ve had a chance to study Mum’s notes in depth,” answered Harry as they continued to shift through the notes a little bit at a time. His mother made an interesting note that stated she was working on a countermeasure for the Killing Curse. Harry flipped through the parchment, but found nothing else that stated anything about that line of work. It had to be an uncompleted project. In fact, it was vague to what exactly Lily meant by her note. Did she mean a way to block it or perhaps bring someone back to life after they got hit with it? It seemed like logical that it was just a way to block it, but something in Harry’s mind wondered if he could be sure about that.

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After Transfiguration Class one day, Harry was held back after class by Professor McGonagall. Normally that would be the cause of much alarm and concern, but since Harry knew he did not do anything wrong, he was not nervous. In fact, he was rather curious of what McGonagall needed to tell him.

“So, Professor, what is it you need to tell me?” asked Harry.

“Potter, as you may have heard and what will be officially announced tomorrow, a tradition of the Triwizard Tournament is to have a Yule Ball, on Christmas” responded McGonagall. “As a champion, no matter how unintentional, it is your responsibility to find a date for the ball and you and your partner will have to open up the dance.”

“A partner for the Yule Ball?” asked Harry, who knew exactly who he was going to ask immediately. “No sweat, Professor. Will that be all?”

“Yes, it will be Mr. Potter, now run along,” said McGonagall and Harry moved from the classroom, ready to slip the Invisibility Cloak over him, but he saw Ginny waiting for him at the end of the corridor. Quickly he moved forward, a confident expression on his face as he moved towards Ginny.

“Hey, Ginny, I need to ask you a question,” said Harry firmly.

“Of course Harry, what is it?” asked Ginny curiously.

“The Yule Ball’s coming up and would you honor me by being my date?” asked Harry and Ginny eyes lit up, before she responded by giving Harry a quick, but wonderful kiss.

“That means yes, in case you couldn’t tell,” said Ginny with a smile.

“Thought so,” said Harry with a grin, before he thought of something. “Ginny, there’s just one problem, I don’t know how to dance and we have to at least open the ball with a dance.”

“That’s no problem, Mum made me learn, I think enough of it sank in where I could teach you,” replied Ginny who really did not like dancing, but she would stomach it for Harry’s sake. “One dance if that’s all, I think we can fake our way through it and leave the Ball to go somewhere private to spend the night.”

“Brilliant idea Ginny, I just have to open the Ball, there’s no one forcing me to stay throughout the entire event,” said Harry as they began to walk down to dinner. “What would I do without you?”

“I’m sure you’d manage just fine Harry, but I don’t want to imagine us not being together at all,” responded Ginny, as they walked down to dinner. It had already begun but there was enough food left to get a decent meal. They moved right next to Neville, who had a special evening edition of the Daily Prophet right in front of him.

“Hi Harry, hi Ginny,” said Neville in an absent minded voice and Harry snuck a quick peak at the article Neville was reading. It appeared that there was a break through of relieving the effects of overexposure to the Cruciatus Curse and Harry could see why that would be of interest to Neville. He had not told Ginny or Luna about what happened to Neville’s parents., that was Neville’s place to do so. “Interesting news tonight.”

“Lucius Malfoy donates to charity?” asked Ginny, as something else had caught her eye. “May I see that Neville?”

“Oh, sure Ginny,” said Neville as he handed her the paper. Ginny took the paper, reading it over. Her eyes narrowed in anger at places.

“Convenient that Lucius makes all of these new donations around the time that a certain bill gets shot down,” responded Ginny and Harry and Neville looked at her. “Some people were trying to pass a bill through that would allow funding to get muggleborns better integrated into our world, by offering a year of education on the structure and laws of the Ministry of Magic even before Hogwarts. But, it was shot down by Fudge.”

“Typical, purebloods complain about muggleborns not being familiar with our world but when the chance comes up to get them more familiar with our world, it gets shut down,” said Harry with a roll of his eyes. Lucius Malfoy appeared to have gotten several of these laws blocked over the years, by some donations that the timing of which was not too coincidental. Lucius appeared to be untouchable by the law.

“He should be in Azkaban, not in a position where he can control the Minister with his gold,” said Ginny bitterly and Harry agreed. The fact that Lucius got away with giving Ginny the diary that put an entire school in danger by only getting sacked from the Board of Governors was proof positive at why something needed to be done.

“The thing is, the Malfoys are too rich, few people would dare oppose them,” said Neville. “If Fudge got a better offer, he might gravitate towards that person but few families have that kind of gold.”

“Or that kind of fame to really entice the Minister along with it,” muttered Harry abruptly as Neville and Ginny looked at him. Normally, Harry did not like using his fame to get ahead, but now, he was reevaluating his stance on that dislike. If it helped him begin to ensure a better world for himself and most importantly his friends, than he might be able to do it long enough without it disgusting him.

“Harry, if you’re thinking what I think you’re thinking, it’s brilliant,” said Ginny, as she just realized what Harry was going to do and felt that if anyone had the resources to do what she was thinking, it was Harry. “You do have more than enough gold to do it.”

“Yes, I do,” answered Harry, as he had the plan forming in his head of what he wanted to do but actually getting to the Ministry of Magic to implement his plans without Dumbledore catching on would be a bit tricky. As much as he wanted to accomplish, Harry could not afford to misstep on his way there.

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Luna, Neville, Ginny, and Harry made their way down the corridors, their practice session having ran a little long and they had missed dinner. Fortunately, there was an alternative way to get food, as Harry had overheard Fred and George talking about how easy it was to get food from the kitchen, because of the house elves that worked there were willing to give it away. So, under the Invisibility Cloak, the four friends made their way down, in front of a portrait of a large fruit bowl. Harry opened his mouth, the twins did not mention how they got inside, but looking at the Marauder’s Map, a sentence that stated “tickle the pear” indicated. Shrugging, Harry reached forward, doing

as the map instructed. The pear giggled, taking Harry aback but the portrait swung open, revealing a door, where the four made their way inside, removing the cloak to allow the house elves to see them, as Harry put the Map away.

"Harry Potter, sir!" shouted an excited but oddly familiar voice, the moment that he entered the kitchen and Harry looked up, to confirm his suspicions as he saw an oddly dressed and very excited house elf bounce up and down on the heels of his feet.

"Dobby?" asked Harry, in surprise as the house elf nodded excitedly, looking at Harry with his wide tennis ball like eyes. "What are you doing here?"

"Dobby is working at Hogwarts, Harry Potter, sir," responded Dobby in an excited tone of voice, as he looked at Harry, all of the other house elves looking up. They seemed impressed that Dobby knew Harry for some reason. "After Dobby has been freed by his old Master, it was being very hard for him to find work. After all, no one wanted to hire a house elf that wanted work but also wanted to be free."

"Yes, I expected that might be a problem," said Harry.

"Indeed, more than Harry Potter sir could ever imagine," responded Dobby. "No matter what, Dobby could not find anyone who would want to give him work but remain free and then, Dobby goes and finds out that Winky has also been freed by her master. Then, Dobby gets to thinking, where could there be enough work for two house elves?"

"So you came to Hogwarts," answered Harry and Dobby nodded in confirmation.

"Indeed I did, Harry Potter, sir," answered Dobby happily. "Hogwarts, the one place where there is never enough house elves, there is work to be done. Dobby also enjoys it because he gets to be near Harry Potter, who freed him but Dobby did not expect Harry Potter sir to come and visit Dobby that soon. Dobby has only been here for a couple of weeks and has just settled in."

“Glad to see you’re finding Hogwarts to be nice, Dobby,” said Luna. “Now if you don’t mind, can you please get us some food? It’s just that we ran a little long and missed dinner.”

“Of course, Harry Potter, sir” answered Dobby happily as the other house elves also happily moved forward, slightly pushing each other, for the privilege to serve the great Harry Potter and his friends. After all, not only did he slay He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named, but he also saved them from a terrible fate. That bushy haired girl was being mean to them, barging into the kitchens, and bugging them, trying to say that they should not work without pay. The nerve of her, she was truly evil and wicked, trying to take away their purpose of living. House elves were made to serve, if that was taken away from, then they had no purpose at all for living at all.

“Sirs and misses, we’s hope that this will be enough, but if you need anything else, please let us know and we’s be happy to get it for you,” said one of the house elves, as a table, with a cloth and four chairs, along with plates and silverware appeared as well, allowing the quartet to sit down.

“Yes, anything to help to help the great Harry Potter and his friends,” squeaked another house elf happily as they got onto their work, as they began to eat.

“This actually might be a bit better than the stuff they serve in the Great Hall, not that this is bad anyway,” said Neville as the others nodded.

“You did a good job guys,” said Ginny as the house elves looked both ashamed and proud at the same time, as they bowed down, as they moved off. Over off to the side, they saw another house elf, that appeared to be depressed and remorseful.

“Winky’s taking being dismissed by Crouch hard, Dobby?” asked Harry and Dobby nodded sadly.

“Indeed she is Harry Potter, sir, Dobby keeps trying to tell her that she might be better off without him, but he’s making no progress, she keeps crying sir,” said Dobby.

“What I’m curious about is why Crouch had such a violent reaction to Winky not staying put,” interjected Ginny suddenly. “I mean, it has to be something deeper than just that...”

“Considering Crouch is in Moody’s office at the oddest times, I think the reason Winky got sacked could be because of that, something sinister going on” said Luna with a shrug. “Of course, it could be because of the cosmic disturbance caused on occasion when Crumple Horned Snorkacks and Nargles attempt to mate, but who’s to say what is going on. Or it could be because of the other theory...”

“Speaking of Crouch, is he in Moody’s office right now, Harry?” asked Ginny and Harry checked the map, before looking it over.

“Not this time, wait Crouch is coming back from Snape’s office, why would he be there?” asked Harry as Luna opened her mouth. “I don’t want to even think about Snape doing anything remotely like that with anything man, woman, animal or well anything dead or alive to be honest with you.”

“Actually neither can I,” said Luna with a slight shudder. “The images could be so horrible, that it could warp reality itself.”

“So, Crouch, what’s he up to anyway?” asked Neville. “Maybe we should ask Winky, try and nudge her into spilling something.”

“Dobby does not think that is being a good idea,” replied Dobby in a cautious voice but Harry stood up. He had to do something, this Crouch mystery was bugging him. Winky sat there, rocking back and forth, a mad look in her eyes. The strain from being sacked by her master had slightly caused the elf to be unhinged.

“Winky?” asked Harry and Winky looked up, before looking down, in an ashamed manner, avoiding Harry’s eyes.

“Harry Potter should not look at Winky, because she is a bad elf and she let her master down,” said Winky in a saddened voice. “If word gets out...it could be bad for lots of people...Winky almost spoiled everything...nosing people...failed her master.”

“In what way could you have failed your master, that Mr. Crouch could have fired you,” said Harry and Winky looked alarmed.

“Sir was there, Winky was not following orders...” stated Winky in an alarmed voice, as she could tell that Harry Potter was figuring out that Winky messed up worse than was obvious.

“It’s more than that and we both know that,” said Harry in a firm voice, that left no room for argument.

“Yes, it is being more than that, but Winky can’t be telling, a lot hinges on it, more than her master hinges on it, Winky is pleading for Harry Potter not to bring it up anymore!” cried Winky as she rocked back and forth looking at Harry. “If anyone were to find out..if the wrong people were to be finding out...it would be bad...”

“Mr. Crouch has a deep dark secret that he does not want anyone to find out?” asked Harry, who attempted to lead Winky on to tell him more that might shed some light onto what was going on but the elf responded with sobs, as she looked rather distressed. Walking over uneasily, a couple of house elves walked over with a blanket, covering Winky up so she could not be seen and her sobs were muffled, as Harry returned to his friends.

“You did the best you could, Harry Potter,” offered Dobby.

“I really thought she was going slip up and said something,” said Ginny as Harry sat right back down.

“She did confirm enough though,” said Luna. “Something is up.”

“That’s true,” agreed Harry but he knew he could not do much of anything about Crouch until they had a better idea. Even with the Map, barging into Moody’s office and looking around would not be the best plan. Knowing the paranoid ex-Auror, his office would be rigged

with all sorts of defenses and traps to deal with intruders. Unless Harry could find out what he would have to deal with, digging around Moody's office for anything would be a foolish move.

"If there is anything else you need, Harry Potter, sir, just ask Dobby," offered Dobby.

"Perhaps a room that we can practice spells in that no one would find us, but I think that might be too much to ask for," said Harry in an off handed manner but Dobby suddenly brightened up at that suggestion, which took Harry aback. "There is a room like that exists?"

"Indeed there is Harry Potter, sir, but very few people know of it and even if they do, they do not know what it really is, as it is only there if a witch or wizard is having a need of it," said Dobby. "It is called the Come and Go Room or the Room of Requirement. Dobby can show it to you if you would like."

"That would be great, Dobby, just wait until we get done eating and you can take us down," said Harry and Dobby nodded, as he awaited for them to finish the food in the Great Hall.

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"I think this room will really come in handy," said Ginny as she looked around, wanting a chair to sit down and sure enough a chair appeared, allowing her to sit down. Three more chairs appeared, allowing Luna, Neville, and Harry to sit down, with Dobby already have returned to the kitchen.

"It will, but where did it come back?" asked Neville. "If the Founders added a room like this, I would think more people would have found out about it by now."

"Unless the Founders didn't build the Room," said Harry.

"That might be right Harry, magic is strange as it tends to lead a life of its own," commented Luna. "The Room of Requirement could be spawned from all of the magic flowing through Hogwarts throughout the years, along with the very powerful spells that were used to keep

Hogwarts standing for all these years and keeping it away from the prying eyes of Muggles.”

“That’s a good point, on an average, buildings, especially one’s as big as Hogwarts don’t normally stand up for that long, even with magic, Gran mentioned once that the Ministry has to be rebuilt at least once a century because the magic fades from around it,” said Neville.

Harry sat thoughtfully, the Founders were considered to be very powerful and very knowledgeable. Before Hogwarts, witches and wizards were more spread out, some having very little knowledge outside of the basics. The magic used to create Hogwarts and have it standing for so long must have been lost forever.

“I wonder if this Room could give me a way out where I can leave Hogwarts without Dumbledore knowing,” muttered Harry thoughtfully and at that moment, a fireplace appeared right in front of them, with a small pot containing what would have been Floo Powder. Harry wondered what else this room could do and decided to put it to the test “Okay, fine, how about the means to solve the golden egg.”

A sizeable basin of water appeared in the center of the Room of Requirement. Quickly, the four made their way over, as Harry dunked the golden egg under the water. They put their heads under the water and quickly, Harry opened up the egg where he heard the following song:

Come seek us where our voices sound. We cannot sing above ground. And while you’re searching ponder this. We’ve taken what you’ll sorely miss. An hour long you’ll have to look. And to recover what we took. But past an hour a prospect’s black. Too long, it’s gone, it won’t come back.

The four friends removed their heads out of the water, looking at each other.

“Basically, I think they might be taking the thing that you miss the most or person,” answered Luna and Harry took a deep breath, as he looked towards Ginny.

“No, they can’t be serious, they’re going to put Ginny at the bottom of the lake, having guarded by mer-people ” said Harry. “I won’t allow it. That’s kidnap...it was supposed to be safe, first dragons, now this, utter rubbish...I can’t endanger Ginny...”

“I don’t think you’ll have a choice Harry,” responded Ginny grimly, but she was happy that Harry considered her the person that he would miss the most and if she was in the situation, she would have though the same thing about Harry. “I know you’ll find me in an hour, I have absolute faith.”

“That’s nice that you believe in me, Ginny, but it’s everyone else that I don’t have faith in, this entire Tournament has been one disaster after another, if I had not thought of summoning the egg, I would have had to fight a full grown dragon and now, it’s bad enough my life is put in danger, but yours as well,” said Harry, as he sighed. Summoning Ginny from the lake would most certainly not work for obvious reasons. The most obvious reason would be that summoning a human being would break every bone in their body and depending on the power of the caster, damage their internal organs as well, not that it was something that anyone could do. Otherwise, more people would use it as a combat weapon, as it could deliver just as much pain as a Cruciatus Curse.

“Harry, we’ll think of something,” said Luna in a reasonable tone of voice. “Perhaps those retrievable portkeys that your mother invented might be something to get Ginny out of harm’s way immediately when the task starts.”

“Actually, Luna does have a point, that could work, providing Hogwarts doesn’t have any wards that cancel out portkeys,” answered Neville with a frown.

“It’s a possibility and one that I hope will work, considering the fact I don’t know how to swing,” said Harry casually.

“You don’t know how to swim?” asked Ginny in surprise. “Those Muggles never taught you I take it.”

“Yeah, they would have hoped I would have drowned,” said Harry in surprise causing Neville and Luna to both wince, and Ginny to look away to hide the venomous look in her eyes. Harry had not outright said exactly how horrible his childhood was, but numerous off handed comments that he had made had given Ginny enough of a picture to see that it was a miracle that Harry had made it to Hogwarts. She planned on having words with the Dursleys in the not so distant future.

“We’ll look into it, but alternatively, is there anything that will help Harry breath underwater?” asked Luna.

“Gillyweed would do the trick, it was in the book that Moody lent me earlier this year,” said Neville.

“That was in the book that Moody leant you, Neville?” asked Harry, in surprise. “The solution to helping me through the Second Task? Doesn’t that seem a bit convenient to anyone else?”

“Actually it does,” said Ginny, in understanding. “It does seem to fit too well together to be a coincidence.”

“Do you think Moody might have put your name in the Goblet of Fire?” asked Luna.

“After what I’ve learned recently, I wouldn’t be surprised by anything around here anymore,” said Harry, as he moved over to the fireplace, the more he thought about everything, the more his head hurt. “I have a couple of trips I need to make, it shouldn’t be all that long until I get back.”

“Should we stay in here then Harry?” asked Neville.

“It might be a good idea, I think the Room disappears if no one’s in it,” said Luna. “I don’t want to even think what might happen if Harry tries to Floo back to a fireplace that is not there.”

“Yeah, don’t worry, we’ll wait up for you Harry,” said Ginny, before she kissed Harry good bye and Harry turned, to the fireplace, getting some Floo powder.

“Gringotts!” shouted Harry as he stepped into the fireplace.

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Cornelius Fudge was sitting in his office at the Ministry of Magic. It had been a very long last couple of weeks. The business with the Goblet of Fire was something that had caused great scandal throughout the Ministry of Magic. Whether or not Harry Potter was the one to tamper with the Goblet of Fire was not the point. The point was someone did and it made the Ministry look bad. Fudge personally did not believe that a mere boy of fourteen could have tampered with a highly powerful magical artifact and the fact that Harry came out as a fourth champion suggested that a fourth school was somehow added to the Goblet. That required a very powerful piece of dark magic that even most full grown wizards could fail to pull off.

“Minister Fudge!” called a voice from outside the office. “You have a visitor outside.”

“I’m very busy right now, can’t it wait?” asked Fudge.

“It’s Harry Potter, Minister,” said Fudge’s aide from outside of the office and Fudge brightened up immediately at this news.

“Send him in immediately,” said Fudge in a bright tone of voice, who knew it would be good publicity for it to be known that he was talking to the Boy-Who-Lived, it might give people the impression that Harry supported the actions that Fudge was taking for his reign as Minister. A recent article written by Rita Skeeter had painted Harry in a good light, a rarity for Rita, and Fudge wanted to capitalize on the positive Potter publicity. He was up for another term within the year and this would give him a nudge in the right direction.

The door opened and Harry Potter walked in, moving towards the Minister.

“Ah, Harry good to see you, it’s been too long since I’ve seen you, ever since that awful mess where Black had attempted to kill you and your friends,” said Fudge in a jovial tone of voice before Harry could say anything, as he grabbed Harry’s hand and shook it, before

motioning for Harry to sit down. "Even after all of that nonsense involving the Goblet of Fire, I trust you have been holding up as well."

"I have Minister, I apologize for taking up a few minutes of your time but there are some things that I want to talk about," said Harry, as he fixed his face into a mask of a naïve fourteen year old boy who could be easily manipulated for the gains of others.

"No trouble at all Harry, no trouble at all but first let me assure you that I am doing everything in my power to find out what exactly happened to the Goblet of Fire, but Dumbledore has been reluctant to allow my Aurors on Hogwarts, he says that Moody is investigating the matter," said Fudge. "Hasn't found anything yet, but if anyone can find it, I suppose Alastor Moody can. Still it would be better if we could have a look. I fear that any evidence tying the culprit to this entire Goblet of Fire mess has been lost."

"Maybe, Minister," agreed Harry, who found it very interesting that Dumbledore had stalled an investigation that would have caught the culprit and perhaps gotten the entire Triwizard Tournament cancelled.

"But, I expect you have to deal with enough of that each and every day, Harry," said Fudge. "So what brings you to the Ministry of Magic?"

"Minister, I just recently come into the knowledge that I have certain responsibilities as the head of the Potter family," answered Harry. "It came as a shock, you see I was raised in a Muggle home..."

"Yes, much unfortunate Harry, something that I had nothing to do with, but I wish there had been an alternative, but with Black being thrown in Azkaban, there sadly was not," said Fudge in false sincerity that Harry automatically saw through. "Anyway, back to why you are here, Harry."

"Well as I mentioned, I found out that being the last surviving member of the Potter family, I was the Head, so I do have certain responsibilities and the fact I know so little about the Ministry, people might take advantage of me," replied Harry. "But, Minister, I feel I

could trust you, you seem to be a stand up person. You did help me get out of trouble after that accident before my third year.”

Fudge nodded, barely suppressing a slight smirk. He had a feeling that not getting Harry expelled was going to pay off and now he was right. If he could give the boy some guidance, he could have a very powerful and influential associate that he could use to extend his time as Minister of Magic.

“What exactly do you want, Harry?” asked Fudge

“Well, I wanted to ask if I could have some time to learn my way around the Ministry, to see how everything works and see who the other key players are, except for you of course Minister,” said Harry in an uncertain tone of voice.

“I’m certain that could be easily arranged,” said Fudge with a smile. “Once arrangements are made, I will send word to you discreetly, I suspect that you don’t want certain people to know of this considering they might try to stop you.”

“What ever do you mean, Minister?” asked Harry.

“Well, Harry, I don’t know how to break this to you, but there are certain times where I think Dumbledore is guiding you in a certain direction to benefit him,” said Fudge with a bit of a calculating look in his eyes. “I know he’s a great wizard, but a tad bit misguide and I would hate for you to ruin your life, because of some mistake that Dumbledore. I’ve been distancing myself as much as possible from him as of late, I don’t want to be known as the Minister who had to rely on Dumbledore to do all of his thinking.”

“That would not be good, Minister,” agreed Harry, who was astonished how much he had predicted Fudge’s actions. “You just don’t know who you can trust anymore...”

“Right Harry, but you can trust me,” said Fudge and Harry removed a bag of gold casually from underneath the desk.

"I know I can Minister, your reign as Minister of Magic has been nothing but good and it would be a shame if you did not have the ability to remain in office," said Harry, as he slid the bag of gold in front of Fudge, who took it, wincing as he nearly sprained his wrist because of how heavy it was. "You've done a really good job. I think the Ministry would fall into a wreck without you."

"Thanks for the vote of confidence, Harry," said Fudge graciously, as he opened the bag and was pleased at the amount of gold that Harry had given him. Unlike with Lucius Malfoy, there appeared to be no strings attached. Normally, Fudge would have to jump through hoops and pull a few strings to get some law cancelled or revised to get Lucius's "donation". With Harry, it appeared to be a foolish naïve boy who willingly donated money to Fudge. "Now, it might be a good idea for you to get back to Hogwarts, we'll meet again soon enough."

"Right Minister, good night," said Harry as he left, struggling to keep a triumphant smirk off of his face, as he turned away from Fudge, before walking out of the office. Fudge had bought everything Harry had said at face value. As for the gold, it was no big loss, just pocket change. The interest would restore the vault back to its original value within the week.

As he returned to use the Floo, Harry thought that while it was logical to find a way to get Fudge thrown out of office, it did not fit in with what needed to be done to fix the Wizarding World. Until Harry could get a stronger foothold into the Ministry, Fudge needed to be kept in. He could be controlled by the almighty galleon. It was just the idea to move out of the country and attend a different school. It seemed like a good idea, until Harry really thought about the issue. Why should the government of any other country be less competent than this one? The problems might be different, but the fact was the same. It just looked worse in this country considering it was the center of it. There was no mystical magical utopia that all the corruption that went along with power was nonexistent.

When his mother said the Wizarding World needed to be fixed, Harry was certain she meant everything, not just one Ministry of Magic. Fixing the world was not just a matter of waving a wand and saying a

few words. It would take a lot of careful planning, timing, and a bit of luck as well.

Chapter Seven: Dance:

The school was all abuzz for the Yule Ball. Well mostly the girls, a good lot of the boys were mortified about the entire thing. The hallway was filled with giggling girls, from every direction as far as the eye could see. Many people scrambled to get a date, not to be seen as the laughing stock of the entire school.

Harry would have pitied those people if it was not for the simple fact he really did not care. He asked the girl he wanted to ask from the beginning and right now she was teaching him to dance inside the Room of Requirement. Harry knew he would absolutely hate dancing, iff Ginny was not with him every step of the way and she about much as said so with him. Harry looked in her eyes, as Ginny slowly let go of him, stepping back from him with a grin.

"That's enough for today Harry, you're doing great," said Ginny.

"Well it's because I've had such a wonderful teacher and it really does help that she's completely beautiful as well," replied Harry as a nice cushy chair appeared which gave Harry a chance to sit down.

"The Room must be off, it only gave us one chair," said Ginny but she had a mischievous smile on her face, as she sat down on Harry's lap, before turning her face towards Harry. "Guess we'll just have to manage."

"Or the Room's trying to tell us something," answered Harry as he leaned forward and kissed Ginny. Ginny put her hands on the back of Harry's neck, slowly running her fingers down it which caused shivers to run down Harry's spine, as she snuggled her body closer to Harry and their tongues began to ease their way into each other's mouths. They continued their fun until it became an absolute necessity for them to come up but only long enough to breath as they pressed their lips together. It was getting late, but the Room of Requirement offered them a shortcut to their dormitories

"Amazing," said Ginny after a time that seemed all too short, before she checked the time and signed in disappointment. "Not enough time through, unfortunately we have to get to bed right now."

As if on cue, the Room of Requirement offered a window where the Gryffindor Common Room appeared on the other side and they walked towards it slowly, cherishing the moment, before Ginny turned her attention to Harry and offered him one final kiss for the evening, which Harry took full advantage of.

“Good night Ginny,” said Harry.

“Night Harry, pleasant dreams,” said Ginny with a wink.

“Oh, don’t worry about that,” replied Harry before they made their way to their separate dormitories to go get some sleep.

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Hermione was in a much better mood than she was ever since the First Task of the Triwizard Tournament when Harry and Ginny had rudely shunned her. Sure. S.P.E.W. had slowed to a nearly dead crawl since she could no longer use Harry’s name to get members and the only members were her, Ron, and a couple of first years she threatened into joining. And the fact that house elf Dobby had basically ejected her from the kitchen when she tried to convince the house elves that they deserved better, something that Hermione was certain that Harry had a role in just to spite her.

Still everything was working out for Hermione as she had secured a date to the Yule Ball with Viktor Krum. The Viktor Krum, the youngest International Quidditch Star in the world and Triwizard Champion, he had asked Hermione to the ball. He had said that he had never felt anything with any other girl like had had felt about Hermione. The fact that an International Quidditch Star had wanted her had made Hermione feel smug but the truth was, she only felt one person was good enough for her.

She saw how close that Harry and Ginny had become and it angered her completely. How could Ginny dare come in and take Harry from her? Hermione had worked so hard to steer Ginny away from her crush from Harry but it had backfired and while the crush on the Boy-Who-Lived had been erased, it had been replaced with something

stronger. Ginny had taken advantage of Harry's vulnerability when Hermione had tried to distance herself from Harry, to save himself from being turned dark. She had realized that it was a mistake but Ginny had already poisoned Harry's mind against her. When Harry saw her with an International Quidditch Star, Hermione was absolutely confident that he would see how much he needed her and everything would be back the way it should be.

"Hermione," said Ron as he rushed up to Hermione, looking rather mortified for some reason.

"What's the matter with you?" asked Hermione, as she had never seen Ron so annoyed in her life.

"I asked Fleur Delacour to the ball," said Ron as his eyes widened and Hermione looked at Ron with a slightly amused, mostly irritated look, wondering if his mother had dropped him on his head as an infant. Repeatedly. He had just asked someone that was way, way, out of his league. "What was I thinking?"

"The same thing as usual Ron, you weren't," said Hermione with a sigh, she wondered why she put up with him sometimes. Then again, even she needed to be amused from time to time.

"She looked at me like I'm a slug or something much lower..." stated Ron before he suddenly looked at Hermione, as if struck by some sudden burst of inspiration. "You know Hermione, you are a girl."

"Really, what gave you that clue?" asked Hermione, in a sour voice, as she looked at Ron, she hoped that he was not going in the direction that she thought he was going in.

"Well, I do still need a date for the Yule Ball and I was wondering if you want to come with me," said Ron slowly. "It's not like you have a date..."

"For your information, Ronald, I do in fact have a date," responded Hermione as she looked at Ron. "My date asked me almost a week ago, the fact he did notice that I should be someone to be taken to the Ball before you did does speak wonders and I fully intend to go to

have a good time. But, don't worry Ron, I'm sure that you'll find some girl who wants to go to the Ball badly enough."

Ron looked at Hermione for a couple of minutes, studying her features intently, before he burst out laughing. Hermione looked at Ron as he continued to howl like a mad man.

"Mind I ask what you find so amusing?" asked Hermione as Ron had not stopped laughing. After several minutes, with Ron struggling to keep a straight face, before he took a deep breath.

"Really, Hermione, that's a great joke, someone actually taking you to the Ball, but seriously, do you want to go with me?" asked Ron.

"I can't Ron, as I am going with someone else," said Hermione in a bit of a snippy voice but Ron still looked amused. "Ron, I really do have a date, you're going to have to find someone else."

Ron laughed once again for several minutes, before the serious look on Hermione's face clued him into the harsh reality.

"You really do have a date," said Ron in an alarmed voice, wondering who else would like Hermione, before Hermione just stood there, arms folded on her chest, looking at Ron.

"Yes, I do, just because it's taken you three years to notice that I am in fact a girl does not mean that everyone else is so blind," said Hermione, before adding under breath. "Or stupid for that matter."

Hermione walked off, leaving Ron standing in the hallway, wondering where he got wrong. He thought to ask Harry for help before he remembered that Harry was not speaking to them because of what happened with the Goblet of Fire. Harry should sure hold a grudge and a small, logical, intelligent part of Ron's mind buried deep into his subconscious really could not blame his former friend. Still mostly, Ron was upset, because Harry was being arrogant and he dared to date his sister as well. Not that Ron could do anything about it because he knew Harry would blast him through the wall and if he did not, Ginny most certainly would. He had asked Fred and George to try and talk some sense into Harry, but they refused to do so, saying

that Ron had dug his own grave and that Ginny was old enough to make her own decisions.

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Severus Snape was in a foul mood after the second year Gryffindors had departed from the Potions class. That batch seemed to have taken the word dunderhead to a whole new level. He returned to his office, the house elves could clean up the mess left behind those fools. Moving into the office, Snape decided now might be the best time to do an inventory of his personal stores. Opening the cupboard, Snape held his wand, looking forward. Everything appeared to be in order, except more boomslang skin was missing. This angered the Potions master to a great extent. Boomslang skin was not something that grew on trees, it cost a fair bit of gold. This was the second time that it had been missing. The first had been two years ago. Dumbledore had just decided not to investigate the matter, leaving Snape no doubt that the previous theft had been tied somehow to Potter. If Potter had murdered someone, Dumbledore would have found some way to justify it for the Greater Good.

Snape's thought process had come to Potter, it was strange. The boy had actually been acceptable in Potions recently. It seemed that the moment Miss Granger had stopped being friends with him, Potter had stopped being lazy and began excelling at classes. Being a Slytherin, Snape wondered if Potter had been hiding his full potential this entire time, waiting for the right moment to unleash it. After all, with the Tournament this year, a student having such an improvement would not be a topic for conversation, even if said student was Harry Potter. By the time it was over, the improvement would have been in place for so long, no one would have really cared about it.

Snape had wondered if Dumbledore realized what was going on around him. Potter was becoming better in his schoolwork and a bit more cunning as well. That trick with summoning the egg was worthy of Salazar Slytherin himself. No doubt, Dumbledore would be confident that Potter was under his thumb this entire time, he hated to admit failure after all. Perhaps it was just the fact that Snape was so thorough in reading between the lines of everyone's actions, because

he was the Head of the Slytherin house and had to deal with these matters. Perhaps he was seeing things that were not there.

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Harry, Ginny, Luna, and Neville were in the Room of Requirement, practicing spells once again. The Room had been a valuable asset for practicing more lethal spells that they could not very well do on themselves, producing targets for them. Harry turned to face his target, that had taken the form of his Uncle Vernon, the target sneering at Harry, but Harry took aim.

"Lubricus!" shouted Harry, aiming his wand at Vernon. The spell was supposed to be able to slice through human flesh and if aimed correctly, it could cut through an artery, causing a person to bleed to death. The spell connected with the flesh of the illusion in the Room, connecting right to the throat. Harry watched as simulated blood had dripped from the throat before Vernon crashed to the ground.

"If that was real, he'd be dead right now," remarked Luna. "I think you have that one down Harry."

"I think I do too," confirmed Ginny as the target was the teenage form of Voldemort that came out of the diary, with blood squirting from its throat and it going into spasms on the floor.

Vernon had reappeared and Harry took aim to his wand again.

"Premo!" cried Harry, causing ropes to snake from his wand, wrapping around the illusion of Vernon. The moment simulated Vernon moved, the ropes constricted around him, crushing his lungs, along with breaking every one of his ribs. It dropped to the ground, blood dripping from the illusions mouth. Harry looked around, technically these spells were not dark arts, even though they were considered to be by the narrow Ministry guidelines. They were just really advanced defensive magic, but the affects could be reversed, unlike the dark arts, providing help was provided quick enough "Enough for today."

The training area created by the room had faded allowing the group to sit down in the chairs that the Room of Requirement had created. It would take some time to get down some of these borderline spells, before they had a chance to move onto the really interesting stuff. Given what he read on the psychology of the dark arts, Harry knew they would have to start slowly, because many had tried to learn too much and once, thus falling straight into the insanity that could happen to those who had abused the dark arts. The book made it clear in distinguishing the use of the dark arts and the abuse of the dark arts.

"So, what was the reason that Snape kept you for so long after Potions today?" asked Neville.

"Oh, that, apparently some Potions ingredients had gone missing from his store cabinet, he accused me of stealing them, hinting that he thought I had something to do with it," said Harry, shrugging. "Why would I need to steal any of his Potions ingredients, when I can just buy what he has if I need it."

"Yes, well, Snape's not going to be logical about you ever, Harry," said Luna. "Still, what Potions ingredients were stolen?"

"Boomslang Skin," said Harry before he trailed off suddenly. "One of the key ingredients for...a Polyjuice Potion."

"Polyjuice Potion, all of these weird things going on, you being put into the Tournament, Moody helping you with the first task, given Neville the book that gave you a clue for the second task, and Crouch being in Moody's office at the weirdest times," said Ginny. "Maybe you're right Luna. Maybe Crouch is polyjuicing into Moody."

"But if anything, Crouch has been against those who performed dark magic," replied Neville. "Of course that did not stop his son for being caught as a Death Eater."

"Wait a minute, Crouch has a son?" asked Harry, this information was new to him and just added more intrigue to the entire situation.

“He had one,” corrected Neville. “He was sent to Azkaban, he’s dead now, but he was a Death Eater. Crouch had a very violent reaction to it when he found it, Gran told me he disowned him before throwing him straight to the Dementors. Crouch would have been Minister of Magic, had it not been for his son being found out, so I can’t really see him doing anything like that, considering how it cost him his career.”

“Imperius Curse maybe, someone using Crouch to take the fall for their own scheme,” said Luna. “I don’t know though, there is enough going on here that what’s been happening cannot be a coincidence.”

“Yes it might be a good idea to tell what we’ve found to someone who could do something about it, but the problem is, I’m not sure who we could trust,” said Ginny with a frown.

“Normally I would go to Dumbledore, but considering the fact that I can’t trust him and I don’t really have any reason to think that he will actually do anything about it, that’s out of the question” said Harry thoughtfully. “If I go to the Ministry and find someone that I feel I can trust, I may tell them but right now, we’re just going to have to watch our step around Moody for the time being.”

“Speaking of that, did Fudge get back to you about your request to go to the Ministry?” asked Ginny and Harry answered with a nod.

“He said he would arrange some time after Christmas for me to learn my way around the Ministry,” said Harry. “He would get word to me when he can tell me exactly when I can go through the Ministry. It should give me a good idea who should go and who is salvageable if anyone.”

“Do you think anyone in the Ministry is salvageable?” asked Ginny.

“The law of averages would indicate that there are some people that I might be able to sway to understand of the changes that I need to make, but time will tell,” said Harry. “I just know there are going to be more people that will have to be dealt with, then there will be that will be kept around. But that is a bridge that we will have to cross for a while.”

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Harry was in a foul mood a few days before the Yule Ball. It had to do with the fact that he had a very pleasant dream about Ginny interrupted by a Voldemort vision. Harry noticed a couple of things about this vision. The fact that it was not as vivid as it was when he saw the world during the summer had proven to Harry that odd section of his mind had been somehow linked to Voldemort. It was in a fog, but Harry was still able to make out the basic gist of the dream. Voldemort had mentioned something about Crouch being a liability and Wormtail not to allow him to leave the house. The dream had not made any sense at all and Harry's scar moderately stung. It had just added further questions

He had made a great deal of progress with Occlumency. Sure he was not a master, but he would be able to keep someone out of his mind to evade their eye contact. The foreign area of his mind around his scar was a great deal of concern to Harry, but considering his exercises had managed to block it mostly off, it could be contained for the moment. Harry wanted to eliminate it completely, but finding any information about what it was could be a problem. No one had ever survived a Killing Curse before Harry had all those years ago.

"Harry?" asked a voice and Harry spun around to see Ginny sitting on a couch in the Gryffindor Common Room, in her nightdress with a frown on her face. "You couldn't sleep either I take it."

"No, I couldn't," said Harry as he sat down next to Ginny, as the pain in his scar had begun to fade as he edged closer to Ginny, noticing how well her nightdress had showcased her legs. Ginny grabbed Harry's hand. "Voldemort visited me in my dreams, at the worst possible time, but what basically happened was that he was saying something about Crouch being a liability, that he can't go out in public."

"That's odd, maybe the theory about Crouch being under the Imperius Curse is right but...I don't know actually, Moody and Crouch were seen in the same place during the first task," answered Ginny. "Unless Moody was under the Imperius Curse as well, but..."

"I know Ginny, it's all very confusing," answered Harry. "Why are you up this early in the morning anyway?"

Ginny sat there quietly, a troubled look in her eyes trying to debate on how much to tell Harry, he had more than enough to worry about right now than her problems.

"Ginny, you don't have to tell me you know, but you've helped me when I needed help and you know I can do the same for you," said Harry gently. "I want to help you if something's troubling you Ginny."

"Okay Harry, they've slowed down since then, but every now and then, I get nightmares about the Chamber of Secrets," said Ginny with a sigh, but Harry had just sat there, gripping her hand tighter in an encouraging manner. "I don't really remember anything that happened down there, I was out for most of the time, but the nightmares are horrible, even if it's just my imagination making up what happened. This is the first time I've had one since this summer, after the Death Eaters attacked at the Quidditch World Cup. I think they'll fade eventually..."

"I wish there was something to do for you Ginny, you've done so much for me during the last couple of months," answered Harry, who saw Ginny as a very strong person, but it was obvious that the Chamber of Secrets was still a bit of a traumatic experience to her. Harry would have been had he been in Ginny's face. He grabbed her hand, as Ginny swung her legs over, so they were draped over Harry's lap, snuggling her head into Harry's shoulder. "Maybe I can show you what exactly happened in the Chamber of Secrets, that might help you come fully come to terms with what happened."

"Harry, that might work," replied Ginny with a nod. "I just heard what happened, but actually seeing it might put my mind to rest but I don't know how you could do that. Certain spells might be able to replay the memories I suppose..."

"We'll have to look into it sometime," said Harry as he was lightly rubbing Ginny's legs in an absent minded manner but Ginny looked at him in surprise causing Harry to withdraw his hands.

“Don’t stop Harry, that felt relaxing,” encouraged Ginny and Harry resumed his activities, moving his hands slowly up and down Ginny’s legs, marveling at how perfect she fit against his body. Ginny leaned back, drifting back to sleep, as she was curled up into Harry’s lap, as he sat there, the pain in his scar completely gone.

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Dumbledore had just returned from a routine visit with the Minister of Magic. Fudge had wanted to have Aurors investigate the Goblet of Fire more thoroughly and had accused Dumbledore have something to hide. Dumbledore felt that Fudge was becoming more confident in his role as Minister and he hoped he could be reigned back in before it could be a problem. Still, Dumbledore had assured the Minister that Moody had inspected the Goblet thoroughly and had found that while it had been tampered with, there was no clue pointing to who tampered with the Goblet of Fire. Dumbledore trusted Moody’s word, he had no reason whatsoever to lie about what he had found.

Dumbledore also thought about Harry Potter. His successor had been slowly growing into his destined role naturally. Summoning the egg was a stroke of brilliance, something that Dumbledore would have done had he been in Harry’s position. The fact that he was now officially with Ginny Weasley also pleased Dumbledore, it would keep Harry anchored to the proper path and prevent him from following into the temptations of darkness that had ruined many other promising lives. Throughout history, no Weasley had ever turned to dark magic. Dumbledore had researched the matter thoroughly. Otherwise, he would have steered Harry away from her. Sure it was a surprise that Harry had terminated his friendship with Miss Granger and Mr. Weasley, but sacrifices must be made. The Headmaster could not take too direct of a hand in Harry’s life, it might clue him into what he was up to and that could have dire consequences. Still, Dumbledore had wished that someone had guided him to the correct path when he was younger. It would have prevented Dumbledore from making several mistakes that he hoped remained long buried.

Still, if all went according to destiny, Voldemort would return to power before long and Harry would cement his status as the new crusader

against dark magic by his carefully guided victory over the Dark Lord. If Dumbledore played his cards correctly, perhaps he could enjoy a few years of retirement before he headed straight towards the next great adventure.

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Christmas Day had arrived and that meant the Yule Ball. Harry and Ginny had spent most of the morning together, after exchanging gifts, until in the afternoon, before Ginny had to get ready for the Ball. Thanks to some careful meddling on their part, Harry and Ginny had managed to get Neville and Luna to go together to the Ball. Harry was awaiting Ginny right now, as Neville had already made his way to the Ravenclaw Common Room to meet Luna. At that moment, Harry saw Ginny walk forward. He could barely breath, she looked so magnificent that she took his breath as way. Just when he thought she could not look any more gorgeous, Ginny had managed to find a way to prove him wrong.

“Ginny, you look beautiful,” said Harry after managing to reclaim the ability to voice his thoughts.

“Thanks Harry, you’re not too bad on the eyes yourself,” said Ginny as she looked at Harry, smiling. It was obvious he had made a desperate attempt to flatten his hair, which had only served to make his hair even messier than usual. Since that was the way that Ginny liked it, she did not mind. Harry had offered his arm and Ginny had taken it before the happy couple made their way from the Gryffindor Common room, so they could attend the Yule Ball. Harry had the Invisibility Cloak and the Marauder’s Map in his bag, so once they did their required opening dance, they could sneak off to the Room of Requirement to enjoy each other’s company in a more private setting. Having all of those eyes gawking at them did become very uncomfortable after a while.

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Hermione sat in the Great Hall, having made light talk with Krum, but not really paying all that much attention to what he was saying. Overall, she was thrilled at how she had looked. It took her a great

amount of time to get ready for everything, including her hair and the enhancement charms she put on certain areas. Harry would be certain to remember how much he needed her and would distance himself from Ginny accordingly once he had come to his senses. Hermione would slowly let him back in, she wanted Harry to realize how selfish he was being and how much he needed her.

If it was not for her help over the past three years, Harry would have died numerous times. Granted, he had come up with simply the summoning the egg during the first task but that was a stroke of luck. Harry would have never been able to come up with anything that brilliant without her ever again. Hermione also knew that without her friendship with Harry, no one would take her seriously. Being one of the best friends of the Boy-Who-Lived went a long way in the world. It had eliminated some of the stigma for being a muggleborn witch and had gained her a bit of credibility. So as much as she hated to admit it, it was mutually beneficial.

She turned to tell Krum something but she lost what she was saying when she had seen Harry and Ginny walk into the Great Hall. Hermione watched Harry and Ginny, and by the looks of things, she was not the only one. She saw that most of the other people in the Great Hall were watching them as well, in awe. Hermione looked, it appeared neither of them had noticed the stares they were getting.

"Herm-Own-Ninny?" questioned Krum in a concerned voice. "Are you alright?"

"Fine, Viktor, I'm just fine," said Hermione through gritted teeth, as she watched several other girls, many much more naturally better looking than Hermione, had attempted to maneuver their way towards Harry, but Harry had ignored them, he had eyes for only one girl. This was not going to go the way Hermione had planned.

On the other end of the floor, Harry and Ginny moved through, avoiding the odd amount of individuals that were in the way, until they met up with Luna and Neville who were waving them over.

"You've seemed to attract a bit too much attention, both of you," remarked Neville.

"Yes, we might have to have drying charms ready, because of all the drool that hit the floor when both of you walked into the Great Hall," added Luna, as she looked around the Great Hall.

"Really, I hadn't noticed," said Harry, who had been too busy looking at Ginny to even notice that there were in fact other girls in the world. "Oh wait, there they are."

"Yes, gawking at what they never appreciated and can never have, funny how some of those people were slandering you for putting your name in the Goblet and now they can't take their eyes off of you," said Ginny, if it was a year ago, she would have been jealous at all of the attention that Harry was getting. Now that she matured and got to know Harry, she was mostly amused at the entire situation "Or rather it would be funny if it wasn't so sad."

"It's still funny, considering none of them would ever match up to you, Ginny, in all aspects and they think they have a chance," said Harry as all four of them laughed, before making their way over to the table.

"Speaking of pathetic," muttered Ginny in Harry's ear, as she pointed out Hermione, who sat on the end of the table, making strained conversation towards Viktor Krum. Looking around, it appeared Ron had not found a date. "Something tells me that someone's trying to get you to notice her and is jealous of me."

"Really, too bad for her, perhaps she should have thought about that before she betrayed me," said Harry, as he had just completely ignored Hermione, hearing a huff of indignation from the distance. "Not that she would have had any chance anyway."

"Really, why?" asked Ginny who was curious. After all, Harry and Hermione were close until the Goblet of Fire incident, there was always a fear that Harry and Hermione would begin dating before Ginny had a chance to work up the nerve to be close enough to him without blushing.

"Well, I did think of her as a sister, right before she stabbed me in the back and besides, I don't really like being bossed around anyway, so

it would not have worked on that front either” said Harry. “Plus, I think Ron’s more her speed anyway. He needs to be told what to do.”

“True,” answered Ginny as the two had began to eat dinner, as more people stared at not only Harry but her as well. They both paid these people staring at them no mind, only briefly talking to Neville and Luna at times, but mostly enjoying the fact that they were together, even if there were hundreds of other people along with them. After that time, Harry and Ginny had made their way to the dance floor, where the champions and their partners were crawled. The lessons that Ginny had given Harry had stuck to his mind, as they danced on the floor.

Despite the fact that the Great Hall was full with people, there was no one else in the world other than each other right at the moment, as they gazed into each other’s eyes. The music played was slow and when it ended, Harry and Ginny had slowly drifted apart from each other. The desire to kiss each other was overwhelming but neither wanted to make a public spectacle out of it.

“Let’s get the Cloak and slip discreetly out of here,” whispered Harry in Ginny’s ear and Ginny nodded, as they moved over. They said a quick, discreet good bye to Luna and Neville and will nearly outside the Great Hall when they heard a very familiar voice.

“Ginny,” said Percy as he cut off to the side of the two, before he turned to Harry. “Harry.”

“Percy, what are you doing here?” asked Ginny.

“Mr. Crouch has been feeling a bit under the weather, and since it was his duty to attend here, I came in his place,” said Percy, before he looked at Harry and Ginny. “So, Ginny, it looks like Harry is taking you to the Yule Ball.”

“Yes, we’re dating,” answered Harry in a firm voice, he was not in the mood for an overprotective big brother speech right now. Percy looked at Harry, before looking away from Harry.

“Does Mother know about this?” asked Percy as he had his eyes focused on Ginny. “Because I could have sworn she said you were not to date anyone until you were of age.”

“Perhaps, but I don’t really care what Mum says,” said Ginny and Percy looked on in an affronted manner, looking at Ginny.

“Look Ginny, it’s not my business, I know,” said Percy in a strained voice, who actually thought Harry was a good choice if someone had to go out with his little sister, but he would have approved of Harry even more if he would not have been so far underneath Dumbledore’s thumb and thus Ginny would get taken down by extension. “But still, Mother’s going throw a fit when she finds out about it.”

“Let her, if she wants to be lonely in her old age, that’s her business,” remarked Ginny coolly. “Besides, it’s not like she has much of a say over Harry. If Harry wants to be with me, there is nothing Mum can do to override him after what happened during my first year.”

Harry looked at Ginny, with a confused expression on his face and Percy looked to be realizing something.

“Look Percy, we’d love to chat about cauldron bottoms or whatever, but Harry and I really have to go,” said Ginny as they slowly eased their way from the Great Hall. When they were sure that no one was following them, they slipped the Cloak over themselves and walked down the hallway.

“What was that about?” asked Harry and Ginny looked at him, with a surprised looked. “About the fact that your mother would have no say about us dating even if she wanted to.”

“Oh, the life debt that I have to you when you saved me, I can do anything you want to fulfill it. If you wanted to, you could make me into your personal slave,” said Ginny.

“I would never do that to you,” replied Harry.

"I know," answered Ginny with a confident nod. "But considering that Mum likes to meddle, it can be used as leverage to us off of our backs."

"I would think your mother would understand if we wanted to date," offered Harry but Ginny looked at him with a remorseful look, it appeared that she was about to tear down another part of what he thought was reality.

"You only see the home life that Mum wants you to see when you are over to the Burrow," said Ginny slowly. "Mum is a control freak. If nothing is done the way she thinks it should be, she should be happy. She does not want me to have any ambition either, except to be a house wife, to put out as many kids as possible, and to be a proper lady. In other words, there are some times where I don't think she sees me as her daughter, she wants me to be her clone."

"Ginny, I'll support you with anything you want to do," said Harry in an approving voice, frowning, he had known Mrs. Weasley could be a bit abrasive at times, but the amount of control she wanted to impose on the lives of her children, especially Ginny, had been far beyond what Harry could imagine.

"I know Harry," said Ginny. She was lucky to have someone like Harry. Her brothers had treated her like she was a five-year-old the majority of the time, her mother had tried to mold Ginny into her own image, and her father, well he was whipped by his wife. Harry on the other hand treated her like she was special, helping her, supporting her and she could never do enough to return the favor. If Ginny was forced to choose between her family and Harry, the choice would be obvious. Harry might not be perfect, but he was as close as one could hope for in this messed up world.

"Look at that," hissed Harry, as he saw Snape and Karkaroff talking in a frantic matter in the distance. The two edged closer to get a closer look at what they were saying, something about them had told Harry that it might be of interest to them.

"Severus, it's impossible to ignore it any longer, it has not been as clear since that night where he fell," said Karkaroff under his breath. "I

worry, the Dark Lord might be returning, the only thing it has done is not burned.”

“Whatever happens, happens, Igor,” said Snape calmly. “I will not allow myself to get bent by something that might amount to just a false alarm.”

“But Severus I think we should get out before it is too late,” argued Karkaroff, as his eyes darted around in a paranoid manner.

“Then leave, go as far as you can, if it does come to what you fear, that no amount of fleeing will save you,” said Snape. “I however will not lose my head and am staying at Hogwarts.”

At that point, Snape had discovered some activity in the bushes. It appeared that Harry and Ginny were not the only ones who had snuck off early to spend time together outside of the Ball but others had been foolish enough to do so in public where they can be caught. Several students ran off, looking embarrassed as Harry and Ginny edge away, careful not to attract any attention. Despite the fact they were underneath the Cloak, they were still solid. They looked at each other, wondering what that was all about. It added more questions to the strange events of the year.

They would think of the matter further later. Right now, the Room of Requirement was awaiting and they had an appointment that they felt they had to keep. .

Chapter Eight: Exploring

“Good day, Harry, I hope your journey was well,” said Minister Fudge at the Ministry of Magic just a couple of days after Christmas, shaking Harry’s hand with a jovial look on his face. “You didn’t have all that much trouble getting away from Hogwarts to come here, did you?”

“No, Minister, with all the people staying over the holidays because of the Yule Ball, it was easier to slip away, too many people and I do have friends covering for me as well,” remarked Harry and Fudge nodded, before the door of his office opened and inside walked a toad faced looking woman, who was surveying Harry with a bit of a curious expression.

“Ah, Harry, I’d like you to meet Dolores Umbridge, she’s my senior under secretary,” said Fudge.

“Hello, Mr. Potter,” said Umbridge in a sugary sweet voice that gave Harry a sudden urge to visit the dentist as she reached out her fat hand for Harry to shake. “Cornelius has told me you are willing to learn about how the Ministry of Magic really works and I find that quite interesting, an attitude that more people should take. Considering how many people try and come in here to inspire change that really doesn’t benefit the Ministry or the people that serve us, it’s refreshing to see someone wants to learn how we should work and save us a lot of time and trouble.”

“Yes, you wouldn’t want that,” said Harry with a neutral look on his face, trying to hide his disgust at this woman. Once he got his foot into place, she would have to be one of the first people to go, as just a few sentences had given him a general idea of the political opinions Umbridge had held. They were counterproductive to any change or rather anything that resembled a competent government.

“Well, Dolores, we best not keep Harry here for too long, there are many more things he needs to know and see to truly see exactly how the Minister of Magic works,” said Fudge as he looked at Harry with a nod. “Very well Harry, let us go then, much more to see and many more people to meet.”

“Lead the way, Minister,” encouraged Harry as he followed the Minister of Magic down a winding hallway. The hallway was mostly empty with the exception of a few people frantically running around, with pieces of parchment in hand. Obviously, this appeared to be business as usual for the Ministry as Fudge did not even flinch when someone had nearly ran into him.

“And here we have the Auror division, Harry, a place that some really do overlook when they talk about the important areas of the Ministry, but really, very important, some of the most talented and intelligent wizards work in that department,” said Fudge. “And, it’s not like anyone who can wave a wand can be an Auror, no, you need to be intelligent enough to keep up with some of the most dangerous and cunning dark wizards out there. Not to mention the need not to be able to crack under pressure. I sometimes honestly believe that running the entire Ministry for a year is less stressful than a day in the Auror Department. Even when there is no dark magic activity, there is work to be done.”

“Sounds like very few people would apply,” said Harry, who had no desire to be an Auror and basically do for a career what he found himself doing for free during his first three years at Hogwarts.

“Indeed, Harry, it seems like its dropped off, only seven new applicants in the past thirteen years, it’s the Potions requirement that gets most people, not too many people want to take it or are able to take it after their O.W.L. examinations are completed, it’s lucky that You-Know-Who is dead, otherwise, the Auror department being short handed would be more of a problem with the lack of new people applying and well, a lot of them being killed,” said Fudge with a dark chuckle, before a figure with a beard that resembled the mane of a lion, with a few scars on his face. While it was not as bad as Moody, it was obvious that this man had been in more than a few battles in his life. “Ah, Harry, this is Rufus Scrimgeour, he is the Senior Auror.”

“Harry, as in Harry Potter, the Harry Potter?” asked Scrimgeour as his eyes peered up, locking onto the scar on Harry’s forehead. Harry was used to this by now, but still, it illustrated how shallow the Wizarding World was.

"Yes, I'd be that Harry Potter," responded Harry as Scrimgeour nodded. "Pleased to meet you, Mr. Scrimgeour."

"Likewise Harry, you've made my job a lot easier at the very least," said Scrimgeour with chuckle. "If He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named would have fallen, then...well I can't even begin to tell how many more hours we'd have to put into this Department."

"Yes, I think that night has made the lives of the Ministry a lot easier," said Fudge with a nod as Harry just stood right before them.

"Ever thought of being an Auror, Harry?" asked Scrimgeour and Harry looked at the grizzled Auror. "Because, I think you would be a good one if you put your mind to it and we need all the help we can get.)

"Perhaps one day, but right now, I'm just trying to learn what I can about the Wizarding World before I assess my options," said Harry and Scrimgeour nodded.

"Very smart of you Harry," said Fudge in an approving voice. "Too many people focus on a career too much, without assessing their options. I wish I had been as forward thinking as you were when I was your age. I worked as a Hit Wizard for several years, a bit below an Auror, but still a very stressful job. Paid well enough but it was the most miserable time in my career. Once I started focusing on other areas, I ascended to the role of Minister, maybe a few years later than I would liked to."

"Yes, well, it would be an honor for you to think of choosing to be an Auror as your career path, I think you would be a great asset to our department," said Scrimgeour as he surveyed Harry, before quickly correcting himself as if not to offend Harry. "Not that you would not be a great asset for any job you choose to do at the Ministry, but as Cornelius might have mentioned, the Auror Department is rather short handed."

"Yes, the Minister did say that," agreed Harry, avoiding the temptation to roll his eyes, as it was obvious that Scrimgeour wanted Harry to work as an Auror, for the prestige of having Harry in his department. "I'm not saying yes or no, but I am considering my options."

"Of course, Harry, of course," said Scrimgeour, nodding his head, he could since convince the boy. He had seen his Defense Against the Dark Arts marks, they were most impression, with the exception of his second year but that was forgivable since Lockhart taught that year. Dumbledore was the laughing stock of the Auror Department that year, as they wondered what Dumbledore could have been thinking to hire that pompous fool. "Well, Harry, I believe you have some other business to attend to and in fact, I best be getting back to work. Paperwork to be done and all that, I suspect I'll talk to you soon enough."

"Well we'll let you get onto that, Rufus," said Fudge as he motioned for Harry to follow him. Fudge had pointed out several more witches and wizards as they made their rounds through the Ministry. It was obvious the recent Rita Skeeter's articles had boosted Harry's reputation. As long as she wrote what Harry wanted her to write, then she could give Harry all of the press he wanted. However, if Rita put one toe out of line, a few words and a few Galleons to the right people would be all it took to demote Rita to cleaning the toilets at the Daily Prophet headquarters the Muggle way.

"Harry?" asked a voice and Harry spun around to see Mr. Weasley standing there, with a confused look on his face, as he looked at Harry.

"Oh, hello, Mr. Weasley," said Harry as Fudge looked at Arthur with an indifferent look on his face.

"What are you doing here anyway?" asked Arthur in a confused look, he was baffled at the reasons why Harry would be at the Ministry, talking to Fudge of all people. He wondered if Fudge had arranged this for his own favor. "Does Dumbledore know why you're here?"

"Now, Arthur, I doubt Albus should have any concern about Harry being here," said Fudge with a stern look on his face. "I mean, it's not like Dumbledore is Harry's legal guardian or anything, Harry is the last living member of a very prominent family. He wants to learn all he can about the Ministry. One day he could be a key member of our government after all."

"Don't worry Mr. Weasley, I doubt the Minister of Magic would do anything to take advantage of me," said Harry as Fudge looked on in an approving manner and Arthur resisted the temptation to roll his eyes. Harry was a good kid, but hopelessly naïve. "Besides, I would hope that Professor Dumbledore has better things to do with his time than monitor my every action. He's a great wizard, I'm confident he would not stoop to that level of spying on me."

"Let's hope not Harry, he could be brought into the Ministry for charges for stalking if he was," commented Fudge lightly as he looked to Arthur. "I trust that the information that Harry was here will not find its way outside the Ministry walls. I would hate to see a long term employee lose his job."

"I understand, Minister," said Arthur, as he stood there, careful not to betray what was going through his head. Obviously Dumbledore would find out anyway one way or the other, regardless of what he said. He was actually more worried about Molly finding out, because she was likely to throw a fit about Harry trying to learn his way around the Ministry, saying that he was too young to worry about something like that. It was difficult for her to understand, but he was pretty sure that Harry's childhood ceased the moment that he received that scar. Arthur was pretty sure that the Dursley had made sure Harry's childhood was not that would be ruined. The bars on the window had raised an alarm in Arthur's mind at Harry's less than pleasant childhood. Of course, when they raised their concerns to Dumbledore, Dumbledore said it was for the best. While, Molly had taken Dumbledore's word at face value, Arthur was not so sure that Dumbledore had made the right decision. Not that he was going to go against his wife when she had said they would drop the matter when Dumbledore insisted they would.

"Very good then, Arthur," said Fudge as he led Harry down the hallway into the lift, as they moved down the lift, before getting out. "Ah, the area of the Department of Magical Law Enforcement that I told you about, a very important but rarely used area of the Ministry. The Wizengamot courts, we only use these occasionally."

“Exactly how often, Minister Fudge?” asked Harry, in a curious tone of voice and he was actually kind of curious at exactly how the Wizengamot really worked. As far as he could tell, most decisions were made through the Minister’s office, with the input of the Department heads, but at times, the Wizengamot was used to hash out more crucial issues, especially when they could not get a consensus on a matter between the Department heads.

“Oh every so often, when new laws are put through, it very rarely happens though,” said Fudge quickly. “It was used more often at the height of He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named, to vote on the sentencing of captured Death Eaters, but over the last six or seven years, the courts had not been used for that purpose and...Harry, I would like for you meet Madam Bones, the head of the Department of Magical Law Enforcement. Amelia, I trust you have heard of Harry Potter.”

“I might have somewhere,” said Madam Bones dryly. “A pleasure to meet you Mr. Potter, I expected to see you around here much sooner, three years ago as a matter of fact.”

“Really, why is that Madam Bones?” asked Harry in a confused tone of voice, wondering why she might have expected to see him sooner, but something told him that this was another thing that Dumbledore had kept to him.

“Well naturally as the last surviving member of an influential family, you are entitled a vote on the Wizengamot,” said Madam Bones. “The fact that you’ve not taken this seat on the Wizengamot has lead to a few problems, as without you there is an even number of votes on the Wizengamot and thus votes end in a deadlock more often than not.”

“Really, I was unaware, I’m just learning about some of the things around me, including the responsibilities I have,” replied Harry in a slow voice. “What would happen if I did not take this seat on the Wizengamot?”

“Well, it will be open in case you change your mind or available to the next blood member of the Potter family should you have any children,” answered Madam Bones. “Or you could sign the seat over to someone else, and believe me, there have been many people

claiming that you have given them the blessing to take your vote. Naturally, they were unable to provide any proof that would override the ancient magic that governs the Wizengamot.”

“Of course, they wouldn’t, as Harry said, he did not know of his responsibility until you just mentioned it, Amelia,” said Fudge. “Harry, I would strongly recommend you thinking about taking a position in the Wizengamot, we could use a sharp young mind like yours.”

Harry just responded with a nod. In all truth, he would slowly ease his way into the Wizengamot, mostly because it would give him an idea who he could trust and who he needed to replace. The thing was, that along Dumbledore was the Chief Warlock, it would be difficult for Harry to do anything without Dumbledore catching on to what he was up to. Of course, a few more donations to Fudge and some well placed words, Harry was confident that he could get Dumbledore’s power at the Ministry to be lessened. He would have to play everything carefully, but changing the world was not something that could be done easily. Otherwise, more people would try and do it.

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Right in the Room of Requirement, Harry sat on the floor, with a pensieve that he had purchased on a trip to Diagon Alley. After having the payments that the Dursleys received pulled and being informed the goblins were launching an investigation what they perceived to be fraud committed by the Dursleys, Harry had purchased the magical artifact. It cost a couple of hundred galleons, but it was the best way to show Ginny what had happened during the entire mess with the Chamber of Secrets. Besides, there would be other uses for the magical artifact. Harry sat on the floor, as Luna, Neville, and Ginny stood, awaiting Harry to finish the process of placing his memory inside the bowl.

“Okay, this should work, I’ve removed the memory, if you’re sure you want to see this Ginny?” asked Harry.

“I’m sure Harry,” said Ginny in a firm voice. She had a feeling this was not going to be pleasant but it was necessary.

“Do you want us to come with you two?” asked Neville but Luna shook her head.

“No, this is a journey, that Harry and Ginny must take by themselves,” said Luna in a calm voice, as Harry grabbed Ginny’s hand in a comforting matter, before the two leaned headfirst, before falling into the memory.

They were standing in the darkened section of the Chamber of Secrets, as a crash was heard in the distance. Harry figured that it was when Lockhart had attempted to modify the memories of himself and Ron and it had backfired, causing Lockhart to be even more of a brainless idiot than he already was. Sure enough, seconds later, they watched the twelve year old version of Harry walk by, robes covered in muck, but with a focused look on his face.

Ginny stood by, she had remembered that slightly before this, Riddle had dragged her down into the Chamber against her will, taunting her, mocking her for trusting him, and saying that she was a foolish little girl that would doom Harry to death. Ginny cried, not for herself, but for Harry, she knew he would come down here and try to save her, even if the trap was very obvious and it would be all her fault if Harry had died. They continued to follow Harry, as Ginny gave a gasp, as she saw her own eleven year old body. Helpless, weakened, unmoving, it was very creepy. Harry had put her arm around her, causing her slightly comfort, as they watched the younger version of Harry move over towards the younger version Ginny.

Harry had watched his younger self, pleading for Ginny to be alright, begging for her to be okay, it was obvious that he was very distressed. In fact, Harry could not remember a time where he had been more frantic than he was once he saw Ginny in such a state. Now he had knew the reason, even if had been purely subconscious back then. He moved over, watching Tom appear in the distance, cursing himself for being such an idiot for letting Riddle get possession of his wand. Watching the back and forth banter between himself and Riddle, including the revelation that Riddle was really Voldemort. It was also convenient that Fawkes had showed up at the right time, just before Voldemort had set the serpent on Harry.

Then the basilisk attacked. Ginny looked at the creature but Harry had instinctively closed his eyes. Ginny marveled at Harry's quick thinking, most people would have frozen and thus gotten themselves petrified or worse. She watched as the phoenix had dove down, impaling its claws into the eyes of the basilisk, causing blood to splatter from them. The basilisk was not deterred, as Riddle had continued to order it to go after Harry. Harry had once again, in a bout of clumsy, but quick, planning had dove towards the Sorting Hat, putting it over his head. Seconds later, a sword fell out and Harry grabbed it. It was obvious by his moment of indecision that Harry had never seen a sword in his life but nevertheless had the presence of mind to stab the sword into the roof of the mouth of the Basilisk. Ginny's eyes widened in horror, as she watched the sharp fang of the basilisk impale Harry right in the arm. Even though she knew everything turned out well, it was still unnerving to see Harry be bitten by a particularly venomous snake.

Voldemort had taunted Harry, but as it appeared he was barely able to hang on. Harry felt it was remarkable that he did not collapse right there, the expression on his face betrayed the great pain he was feeling. As Fawkes lowered down, his tears healed Harry's wound as he struggled to his feet. Riddle's alarm when he realized what happened was great, just as the look of absolute horror on Riddle's face when Harry had the basilisk fang in his hand. Quickly, Harry stabbed it directly into the diary and Riddle shrieked, as ink squirted out of the diary. Since he was so worried about Ginny, Harry had not noticed the fact Riddle was painfully ripped apart from what happened.

"So, that's what happened," said Ginny as she watched herself get up, looking alarmed and right then, she was terrified about what happened, also ashamed that she had been so foolish to trust that diary. "I don't know how much it will help but thanks Harry."

"No problem, Ginny," said Harry, as he gripped her hand tightly. "Are you ready to leave?"

"Yes, I am, Harry," responded Ginny, as she had a few questions on her mind, that she would address when they had left the memory.

Hand in hand, both of the teenagers left the pensieve, with Neville and Luna waiting for them.

“Well, Ginny, do you have anything that you want me to answer?” asked Harry, almost as if he had sensed that Ginny had questions that needed to be answered.

“Well, I’m just curious, call it morbid, but I was wondering something. Could the basilisk still be down there?” asked Ginny.

“I would think it might be,” offered Luna. “I mean, the Chamber can only be opened by using Parseltongue and since there are only two known wizards in the last century who could do so, I would imagine that it’s not been touched. After all, it’s not like anyone can learn Parseltongue, it just doesn’t work that way.”

“Harry, actually, I was thinking about this, considering you were the one who defeated the basilisk, the hide and anything else of it is yours by magical law,” said Neville.

“True and basilisk parts are among some of the rarest ingredients, not to mention the venom is a key component in many of the undetectable poisons,” said Harry, more to himself than the others.

“The memory did help, but I was wondering if we could...go into the Chamber of Secrets so we can see if there’s anything that can be salvaged,” said Ginny, more on a spur of a moment, truthfully she would have rather not seen that place again but now she wanted to reassure that there was nothing done there that hurt her. The diary was gone and the basilisk was dead, but still a bit of visual reassurance would be necessary.

“Ginny, are you sure?” asked Harry and at that moment, the sink appeared, much like it had during his second year.

“Guess that answers that,” said Neville as they moved forward.

“Open,” hissed Harry, holding his head steady. He was pleased that he had found a book that allowed him to control his gift, speaking in Parseltongue without being face to face with a snake. It had allowed

him to set a locking charm on his trunk to keep his things secure and put the password to open it in the rare language. Quickly, the sink sprang open and he turned to the others, before speaking. "Okay, it's ready, but be careful, the first step is a bit tricky."

Luna had stepped through first, putting a cushioning spell down at the bottom of the drop to brace for impact. Neville followed, before Ginny and Harry held hands, before taking the plunge together. They dropped at the bottom of the dusty, hallway, the dripping water from above, the faint sounds of Moaning Myrtle sobbing from above, no doubt going through another crisis.

"Keep alert, the tunnel might still be a bit weak from the cave it and the rest of it could collapse if we talk too loudly," whispered Harry in a hushed voice, as they saw the debris from the cave in, several rats moving in and out as well. Carefully, they held their wands, shifting through the rubble, allowing Harry to move forward to the entrance where they had fought the snake.

"Open," ordered Harry and the entrance slid open, revealing the four to move inside. They stopped, as it saw the corpse of the basilisk laying on the floor. While it had the smell of decomposition, it was difficult to tell the different. The great serpent was not only long but thick as well.

"Wow," voiced Neville, looking what they were all were thinking when they realized exactly how much of the basilisk remained in tact.

"Other than the obvious potions ingredients, what do we do with such a large amount of basilisk hide?" asked Luna. "It's supposed to be highly powerful, resistant to most spells, but it's never caught on for protective armor due to the fact it's also so bulky you can't really maneuver around in it, so it's kind of counter productive for battle."

"We'll find some way to use it, I'm sure," said Harry, wondering how he could drain the basilisk fangs of the venom they possessed and store them for future use. Unlike most magical creatures, the venom did not dry out until several years after the death but Ginny was looking around, as if thinking about something. "Okay, Ginny?"

"Fine, Harry, better than I expected I would be after seeing this place again actually I did have an idea," said Ginny and Harry raised his eyebrow. "The Room of Requirement is great, but it's not some place that would always be there, remaining the same, we would have to change it every time we need it. The Chamber on the other hand, only you and Voldemort could get into it. And if you find a way to change a password to something that is not as blatantly obvious, this place can be something that we can use."

"That's right, just clean it up a bit and it will be good to go," answered Luna as Harry stood there.

"Yes, yes, it might work, we have to explore the Chamber of Secrets more thoroughly, I don't know, I find it hard to believe that Slytherin built it just for the purpose of housing a basilisk," said Harry.

"So you think there might be something else down here?" asked Neville.

"I don't know, highly possible, but it's also just as possible that Voldemort had found anything else of value down here when he discovered the Chamber," voiced Harry.

"Still, there could be something that he overlooked," offered Luna.

"Yes, there is, we need to have a look around, along with trying to figure out how to preserve whatever's left of the basilisk," announced Harry, as the group had nodded, before they continued to explore the Chamber of Secrets.

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It was several weeks into January and Severus Snape had entered Dumbledore's office.

"Severus, what brings you to my office this time?" asked Dumbledore as Snape sat down with a foul look on his face, as he looked across at Dumbledore.

"Potter brings me here as it has many times before," commented Snape in a dry manner.

"Now, Severus, as I've told you, you should not judge Harry on your rivalry with his father," admonished Dumbledore, who had given Snape the same lecture so many times, he could do it as his slept. "I find the boy to be a bright wizard, a tad bit troublesome at times, but at his age, we all were. Now, do not give him a hard time about his performance in your class. As difficult as you might find it, not many people take to the art of Potions as easily as you do."

"Headmaster, Potter made an absolutely perfect potion, I could find nothing wrong with it, I had to give him an Outstanding grade and award points to Gryffindor, that's how well it was concocted," said Snape with a sour expression on his face, as if it caused him great, agonizing pain to do so. "It's impossible for a student to have such a great turn around in the class, I'm telling you Headmaster, something is up with Potter. When this year began, he was only ahead of Longbottom, Crabbe, Goyle, and Weasley in his ability to make potions. Now, he made both Mr. Malfoy and Miss Granger look utterly incompetent and they were two of the best brewers in that batch of students."

"Now, Severus, Harry may be taking a bit more serious approach of his education, nothing to get alarmed about," said Dumbledore, who would have been worried about Harry hiding his true power all this time, if it was not for the fact that the Headmaster was positive that Harry did not have one cunning or manipulative bone in his body. "After that entire business with the Triwizard Tournament and the Goblet of Fire, Harry is just trying to learn enough to excel and now he is becoming more astute in his studies. It just goes to show you that adversity helps unlock previously undiscovered talent."

"If you say so, Dumbledore," replied Snape, who had the sudden urge to stab that twinkle out of Dumbledore's right eye. "Now, the matter of the dark mark..."

"As I've told you before, Severus, I think we should not jump to conclusions," said Dumbledore, even though he knew that it was

proof that Voldemort was growing stronger and may return to power within the year. "We know he's still out there, weakened..."

"He tried to steal the Stone and he might be using this Tournament to pull some scheme, there is a number of resurrection rituals that he could use, that require the blood of the enemy, that will return him to power and who better than the child who brought him to his downfall," said Snape.

"He would have had someone inside Hogwarts to do this though," replied Dumbledore.

"The fact that Potter was in the Tournament in the first place should proof that there is no theory," said Snape dully. "And, the Polyjuice Potion ingredients that have gone missing from my personal stores and add to the fact that Moody's been adding a bit-off kilter, even for him."

"Now, Severus, I believe I would know if my Defense Against the Dark Arts teacher and old friend was a Polyjuiced imposter," reprimanded Dumbledore.

"Right, of course, Albus, everyone knows I'm always wrong," said Snape dryly. "After all, I was wrong about the fact that The Dark Lord was sticking out of the back of Quirrell's head and that you were only asking for trouble by sticking the Philosopher's Stone in this school"

"Now, Severus, there's no need for that," admonished Dumbledore. "If that is all, I think I will see you at the staff meeting later this afternoon."

"Of course, Headmaster," answered Snape calmly, before he made his way from Dumbledore's office.

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Draco Malfoy was in a very bad mood right now. The fact that all everyone seemed to talk about was Harry Potter. Especially the girls, talking about how bloody cute he had been become and how they wanted to bed him. It made Draco want to vomit. It seemed like every

girl in the school was looking at Potter. Even, Pansy had looked at Potter in a whole new light. That annoyed Draco. Despite the fact that Pansy was an annoying bitch with a voice that could break windows, she did have other uses and silencing charms were such a wonderful invention.

Despite his discomfort, Draco would be a fool not to notice Potter's new found popularity and increased status. Since he ditched the dead weight known as Granger and Weasley, the Malfoy heir had contemplated renewing his offer of friendship. That was torpedoed when he had attempted to Potter, he disregarded his presence. Draco was offended and insulted, how dare Potter treat him as something lower than a Weasley? He wondered how anyone could stand anyone who was arrogant like Potter.

Sneering, Draco saw two more of his favorite targets and they were bickering. The older Slytherins had invented a drinking game that resolved around the bickering of Granger and Weasley, but Snape had it banned when too many people were sent to the Hospital Wing due to drinking too much alcohol.

"Well, if it isn't The Weasel, the Mudblood, and Potty...oh that's right, Potter isn't with you any longer," taunted Draco, as the two had looked at him with utter contempt. "It took him three years, but it looks like that he finally grew enough brain cells to realize how useless you were."

"Look, Malfoy, what do you want?" demanded Hermione, who was in a foul member.

"Not you Mudblood and it looks like Potter doesn't either," replied Draco with a smug look, causing Hermione to become horrified at his words. "You spent all that time to tart yourself for the Yule Ball, like a common Muggle prostitute, yet he still only had eyes for the Weaslette. She might have been born in a gutter, but at least her blood is pure which is more than I can say for you. Sure, Potter could have chosen someone a bit better off, but quite frankly, with his wealth, I guess he can afford to shoot a bit lower."

Hermione was shaking, looking angry.

"No snappy comeback, Granger," taunted Draco as Hermione looked on the verge of tears. "Guess all your book smarts can't help you in the relationship department. But don't worry, if you play your cards right, I'm sure some old pureblood wizard has use for new toy."

"You bastard, I hate you," said Hermione, in a shaky voice, tears rolling down her cheeks.

"Ah, I love you too, Granger," mocked Draco. "Actually, I don't but Potter will never either. It looks like you're going to have to settle for less than nothing."

On that note, Draco gave a significant nod towards Ron. Hermione looked at Draco, hands shaking, before she ran off as Ron rounded on Draco, looking angry.

"How could you say that to Hermione?" demanded Ron, finally finding his voice.

"Very easily," said Draco dryly. "Honestly, Weasley, you look up abused girlfriend syndrome in a book and your picture should be right there. She smacks you around, belittles you, calls you stupid and useless, yet you still crawl back to her, trying to cater your favor."

Ron had pulled his wand out and Draco had backed forward, falling on the ground.

"What is going on here?" demanded Snape as he walked forward.

"Professor Snape, Weasley had jumped me, unprovoked," said Draco.

"Ten points from Gryffindor Weasley and detention," said Snape casually.

"He was saying bad things about Hermione and me..." started Ron but Snape's glare had silenced him.

"A further ten points for contradicting me and you now have detention for the next two weeks," said Snape. "Perhaps this will finally teach

you to act like a civilized human being other than a barbarian, but I doubt it very much.”

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“Okay, I don’t know if the Portkey idea will work,” said Harry, as they met in the Room of Requirement a few weeks before the second task of the Tournament. With the help of Dobby, they were reconstructing the Chamber of Secrets and cleaning it up for future use, but it was taking a while to do, even with magic. “It took forever, but I finally managed to find out that portkeys can only be created by the Headmaster of Hogwarts or the faculty.”

“So, I guess, we’re going to have to go for the Gillyweed,” said Neville.

“Maybe, but remember about anti-Portkey spells, they can only be keyed through air,” said Luna. “Another medium, it’s impossible to put the spells on and besides who would Portkey under water anyway?”

“You mean it’s possible for travel under the water,” said Ginny and Luna nodded.

“Well, not for everyone obviously, to make a Portkey work under water, it takes a bit more power than the regular Portkey,” said Luna.

“Also, if it’s done in the water and few illusion spells, it will hide what I’m actually doing,” said Harry, nodding, they had to get to work right away, to see if the idea that was forming in Harry’s head could work.

That’s chapter eight. Next chapter will have the second task and a few other important happenings as well.

Chapter Nine: Hostage:

The second task of the Triwizard Tournament was rapidly approaching and Harry continued to work in a diligent manner to ensure that everything that he had planned went off without the hitch. Between planning for the task, practicing new spells, and occasional trips to the Ministry of Magic, Harry had spent a lot of his free time preparing. Still, Harry, Ginny, Luna, and Neville found some time to set aside to relax and not to think about the hard work that was ahead, even if it did weigh on their minds. The more Harry learned, the more he realized that this would take years to even get into a position to make the changes that were necessary. It did help the Chamber of Secrets was close to be reconstructed into something that was useable and Harry had found a way to store the Basilisk venom, along with the skin. It took a lot of charms, that forced Harry to sleep through the night and most of the next morning one day, but it was worth it.

“Okay, I believe everything is good to go for the Second Task, if we have time, we’ll go through this one more time the day before,” answered Harry, as the group stepped away from the center of the room and sank into the chairs that the room provided.

“Twelve times we’ve done this in the last three weeks, Harry, I think we worked out all of the kinks by now,” said Neville as they sank down. The illusion spells that Harry had created would fool nearly everyone, except for those who were looking for them. Harry doubted many would think to look for a staged heroic rescue, while he had already rescued Ginny using the retrieving Portkeys. After all, it was a bit less obvious than summoning the egg.

“Well, you can’t be too careful, we want these portkeys to go unnoticed for as long as possible,” said Harry. “The illusion has to be pulled off precisely at the right moment, otherwise, it won’t work.”

“I think everything will go off great,” said Ginny. “You’ve practiced and while there’s little room for error, you have used any room you can to your advantage. Don’t worry Harry, I know you’ll get me out of there in time.”

“Now, you took a trip to the Ministry the other day, and you promised to tell us about that,” prompted Luna.

“Yes, I did, thanks for reminding me Luna, I almost forgot,” said Harry, as he briefly recalled his trip. “More politicians trying to brown nose me. That Umbridge woman was following me around, it’s almost like she thinks she’s up to something.”

“Harry, I think it will be a good idea if you try and stay away from her,” remarked Neville.

“I agree with Neville, she might try and ruin everything,” said Ginny. “Is there any chance you can get her out of the Ministry?”

“If I had enough leverage I could, but the thing is, Umbridge might be nasty, but she is well connected within the Ministry,” answered Harry. “I can’t just suggest to Fudge that he fire a long term employee like that. Maybe if I had proof that she did something that would ruin him if it was brought to light, but I have nothing on Umbridge right now. I did get a few concessions from Fudge and did find out a couple of things that were interesting.”

“Like what?’ asked Luna, who looked curious at what Harry had managed to convince the Minister to do.

“Well, I managed to suggest to Fudge that more support should be given to muggleborn children or people raised by Muggles, citing myself as an example, saying how embarrassing it must be for someone who is the last surviving member of a prominent Wizarding family to be so naïve on the magical world and he would be looked on as a great Minister if he corrected this injustice from happening in the future,” said Harry, as Ginny, Neville, and Luna listened. “Of course five hundred galleons that I donated to his reelection fund might have spurned his change of heart on the act that Malfoy had shut down not too long ago. The act should be passing through within the next day or so, maybe by the time the Second Task starts.”

Harry stopped for a moment before he took a deep breath and decided to drop what he thought was interesting news, as it just served to illustrate how little control the Ministry truly had.

"I found out something that's apparently kept a rather close secret, only a select few families actually are privy to it, but as it turns out, the Ministry's ability to monitor underage magic is strictly only able to monitor magic in Muggle areas," said Harry. "It turns out, they can't determine who is doing the magic. Just that it is done. Very few magical families live close to Muggles, so it is easier for them to pinpoint magic that way."

"You mean I could have been practicing magic all of this time during the summer and not gotten in trouble," said Ginny with wide eyes.

"That's what it sounds to me," answered Luna. "If only a few families are in on the secret, then they can practice, while everything thinks the Ministry has better way to track everything."

"Still I can't see someone like Malfoy keeping quiet about this, because you know he has to know," said Neville.

"Unless he thinks he can get away with performing magic and that his father will get him out of trouble," offered Ginny. "It's just, well this actually explains a lot. Fred and George's experiments, they have to use magic to pull them off but I don't remember them getting a warning note. Mum screamed at them, telling them they were going to get themselves expelled if they kept it up but that's just Mum for you."

"Do you think they might have known?" asked Neville.

"They could have, they have a tendency of finding out things that they're not supposed to know," answered Ginny as they laughed.

"So now we can all practice magic over the summer, with except for Harry, sorry Harry," said Luna in an apologetic tone of voice but Harry just smiled.

"Considering I'm in the process of funding the next ten or so holidays that Fudge goes on, I think I might be able to twist something where the monitoring for Privet Drive is turned off," said Harry. "Long term

plan is to get away from the Dursleys all together, but I'm afraid that Dumbledore might fight that, thus blowing everything."

Harry sat there, deep in thought, the only way he could get away from the Dursleys with Dumbledore not being able to say anything about it would be if he could get Sirius's name cleared. To that, he needed Wormtail and to get Wormtail, he needed to figure out where Voldemort was, as it appeared based on a rather fuzzy dream that Voldemort was keeping Wormtail close by to make sure he did not flee in terror or regret. It proved to him that his Occlumency was working, a bit more hard work and hopefully he would be able to block out the dreams totally. Still, for everything to work out long term, he needed to cut all ties with the Dursleys.

"Harry?" asked Ginny. "Are you still here?"

"Yes, Ginny, I'm here, just thinking about what's to be done, I can count the people I can trust in the Ministry on one hand and still have fingers left over, but even they I can only trust to a certain extent," said Harry sighing. "Madam Bones for example, she's a fair person, a dying breed in the Ministry, but I'm afraid when it comes time where more radical action is needed, she might not be all that comfortable with doing that."

"Can you see anyone who might be comfortable with making these changes?" asked Neville and Harry shook his head in response.

"No, but it's going to have to be more than the four of us, so we're going to have to trust people in the government that's currently in place right now," replied Harry. "Further than that, no I don't think they will push the envelope."

"After the Tournament we're going to have to give this our full attention, along with Voldemort," stated Ginny and they all agreed, right now the Tournament was the pressing issue.

"Well, Crouch has not been seen in the Ministry since a week after the First Task," said Harry as the others looked at him, curiously trying to figure out what he was getting at. "I had nearly forgotten about him until I heard someone bring it up. Apparently he's never

taken a sick day before now and now he's been gone for almost three months. Percy mentioned that he had been sending instructions in. They've just been investigating the Bertha Jorkins thing over the past week."

"Almost seven months after the fact," said Ginny, shaking her head in disgust. "Still, Percy's saying that Crouch is giving him instructions, but that does not mean anything. Written word could be easily faked."

"Yes, all kinds of spells and charms to do so," said Luna. "People have used them in the past to pass off falsified messages as historically important magical documents. Doing so with a letter wouldn't be that hard. In fact it would be easier, because few people would ever think to routinely check for these spells."

"And considering how Percy trusts Crouch, he wouldn't really have any reason to check for them," said Ginny thoughtfully. "We haven't checked the map in a while, I wonder if he's on it this time."

Harry pulled out the map and checked to see Moody's office, where the two dots of Moody and Crouch were standing. Moody's was not moving, but Crouch was moving about the office, moving towards the door.

"Okay, the first time's a coincidence, but every time after that, sometime's up, it's awfully funny that for someone that is so ill, Crouch is spending a lot of time at Hogwarts" said Harry with a frown as he looked at the map, as he watched Crouch leave the office. Moody still had not moved an inch from the position he started in "All these strange things happening, we have our theories, but what makes sense."

"If there was only was a way to prove that Crouch is up to something," said Neville.

"The thing is, there really isn't, well nothing solid, everything is tied to what we've seen on the Marauder's Map and the Ministry would confiscate it from Harry if they found out he had something like that," said Ginny with a sigh. "And the Map's too useful to fall into the hands of anyone at the Ministry."

“Besides that we really don’t have any proof that what Crouch is up to anyway, just a bunch of guesses that could be totally off,” said Harry as he continued to watch the dot move on the map. He was amused by the fact that only months ago, he would have burst into Moody’s office like an idiot, to see what was going on. Now he was going to take a more cerebral approach and hopefully if Crouch was behind this, he would slip up. The dot had stopped in one location and it took Harry merely seconds to pinpoint where it was “He’s heading for Snape’s office again. Second time we’ve seen him go there.”

“Well, Snape’s bound to catch him in the act,” said Neville with a shudder at the very thought of being caught stealing something from Snape. “I can’t see him losing potions ingredients without a fight, if that’s what Crouch is doing.

“It might be sooner than you think, there’s Snape right now,” commented Luna dreamily. “Looks like something is going to fly and it’s not going to be Nargles.”

As much as they wanted to find out what happened regarding Snape and Crouch, time was edging past midnight, so they used the features of the Room of Requirement to return to the Common Rooms. If anything of note happened, it would most likely be spread through the castle by the morning.

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Snape walked down the hallways, in a foul mood, as he returned from the staff mood and the sight that he saw from his office did not improve his mood whatsoever. He saw the office door ajar, for the third time this year. Snape held his wand, as he walked forward, with any luck, the thieves would still be around and would have to face his wrath. Moving forward, Snape opened up the cupboard, it was obvious that someone had jammed his security spells, as there was no one on the ground put in a coma. That did not improve his mood any, it just worsened it. To do so, among the most powerful dark magic would have to be utilized. Moving forward, Snape opened his cabinet. The intruder had been rather sloppy or hurried, whatever it was, they had not been able to conceal their crime well enough. As

he rifled through the cupboard, Snape's suspicions were clarified. More of his boomslang skin was missing. Angrily, Snape slammed the cupboard door opened, as he realized all the galleons he would lose to replace it.

"Problem, Severus," growled a voice in the background and Snape spun around, wand held, as he saw the grizzled form of Mad-Eye Moody standing in the shadows. "So tense, one might think you're up to something."

"Yes Moody, if I was just sitting down here, staring at the ceiling, you might think I'm up to something" said Snape sourly. "What are you doing down here, Moody?"

"Patrolling the corridors under Dumbledore's orders," said Moody, as he reached into his robes, before taking a swig from his private hip flask, before stowing it back into his robes. "Looking for suspicious figures and activity in the hallway, after what happened with the Goblet, I have to keep an eye out for trouble. And then I hear you slamming your cupboard door. I thought someone was stealing ingredients."

"Someone did steal ingredients, Moody," said Snape sharply. "Boomslang skin stolen again, third time this year, fourth time all together, counting two years ago. At first I thought it was Potter, but even he could not break the spells I put on my private stores, even with his newly evolved skills."

"You seem to be going to insane measures to protect a few Potions ingredients, I wonder what you do have in here," said Moody, as his eye spun around in the socket.

"You know I have nothing illegal in there, Moody," stated Snape sharply. "You thoroughly inspected my office the first day you were here, you left no corner unturned, you even inspected my private quarters and looked underneath my bed. There is nothing that you have failed to find."

"You can never be too careful, Snape," said Moody. "People like you are the trickiest, they always evade justice, hide behind others, but

time will run out one day Severus. Dumbledore has given this job to keep an eye on anyone who lurks in the dark, including you.”

“I find that difficult to believe,” said Snape skeptically. “Dumbledore happens to trust me with his life.”

“Good for Dumbledore,” said Moody with a chuckle, as his eyes did not leave Snape’s face. “I’ll be sure to send flowers.”

“Unless you have any leads on who stole the boomslang skin, then I’m afraid I will have to ask you to leave, Moody,” answered Snape, as he attempted to use Occlumency on Moody to attempt to verify if he was behind the thefts, a mistake. Moody’s magical eye only served to give him migraines.

“I think you have mistaken me for one of your first year Gryffindors, Snape,” said Moody gruffly, as his eye looked around behind him to ensure no one stood in the shadows, before both eyes snapped right towards Snape, looking over the Potions Master. “I will leave, it is possible that the thieves are still in these dungeons. I will send word should I find anything.”

“If you must,” answered Snape coolly as he watched Moody leave. He did not take his eyes off of Moody or make any sudden movements until the clunky of Moody’s wooden leg had faded off into the night. Once Moody was gone, Snape wasted no time in conducting his own investigation on his store cupboards to search for any evidence such as fingerprints that may point to the thief.

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“Cornelius mind telling me what this is?” asked Lucius Malfoy as he entered the office of the Minister of Magic, waving around the latest copy of the Daily Prophet. Fudge took it, looking it over.

“Ah yes, the Muggleborn Support Act, it just passed the other day,” said Fudge. “At first, I thought it was a bit of a counterproductive idea, but an associate of mine had pointed out to me the benefits of such an act and I think it will help everyone.”

“And I pointed out the drawbacks, which are even greater,” countered Lucius. “Taxes will have to be increased, especially among the old families, to compensate for this new funding.”

“Yes, Lucius I realize that, but everyone’s going to have to do their part to make for a better Wizarding World for all,” said Fudge. “Besides, you were mistaken about one thing so far.”

“And what would that be?” asked Lucius.

“You said my approval rating would plummet if I allowed this act to pass but it raised by twelve percent, the highest that it’s been since I took this job,” said Fudge in a jovial manner.

“The uneducated masses weigh in on these matters sooner, it may look like a great gain in the short term, but long term, you stand to lose a great deal, Cornelius,” replied Lucius swiftly. “Also, while I’m here, there is something that I must inform you. I regret to inform you that the planned five hundred galleon donation towards your efforts to remain Minister of Magic needs to be funneled elsewhere. The Department of the Disposal of Dangerous Magical Creatures are desperately in need of it, werewolf attacks are on the rise over the past year.”

Lucius stood, waiting for Fudge to try and make concessions about the new act, to promise to get it overturned, as it was clear that without his funding, the Minister would be sunk. However, Fudge did not blink at Lucius’s news.

“It is just as well your gold is funneled into other areas as I’m rather well funded by the associate that had opened by eyes to the benefits of the Muggleborn support act,” replied Fudge as Lucius sat across from Fudge and attempted to make sense of this quite annoying development.

“How very generous of this person,” drawled Lucius as he kept the disgust out of his voice, but he was racking his brain on who would both have the funding and actually take an interest in supporting muggleborns. The list was very short and the names on that list that actually would try to face Lucius on this were even less. Dumbledore

would be an obvious suspect to most people, but Lucius knew better. The old man might talk about people of all bloodlines being equal, but he would never rock the boat to this extent. That was not the game he played.

“Yes it was, I wanted to show his support for my work so far as Minister,” commented Fudge. “He has been more than generous with his donations, perhaps there may be more to come if I help assist some of his ideas.”

“Has it occurred to you that he might be bribing you to get these acts through?” asked Lucius, who knew the game all too well. It was one that he had learned to master and once again, it was difficult to try to figure out who this person was. Most people would ask outright but Lucius felt that showed a sign of weakness. Fudge would tell him willingly who the new player was and then Lucius would use whatever connections he could muster to deal with him.

“Perhaps, but I doubt it, I would think I would be able to catch onto a bribe,” said Fudge. “Don’t worry Lucius, so far everything has been given with no strings attached. They’re just donations, but I think by passing through a few laws here and there that he might be happy with, it will keep the donations coming. Running these dinner parties to forge all of these connections to gain support is not cheap.”

“Do what you feel you have to do, Minister,” said Lucius blandly, wondering if the Minister was just fabricating this person to get more gold from him but he discounted the notion immediately. Fudge had attempted similar tactics in the past but had caved in the moment that Lucius hinted he might redirect his gold elsewhere. Now, he seemed to be unconcerned with the fact that he was losing out on hundreds of Galleons, so they had to be coming for another source. “I must leave now Minister.”

“Of course, Lucius, farewell for today,” answered Fudge as he watched Lucius get up and leave the office. Truthfully, he could have told Lucius that it was Harry Potter that had donated funding recently in the Ministry, but Fudge decided against it. A resourceful man like Lucius would find out sooner or later, he did not need help to come to the conclusions. Once, Lucius had found out, it was highly likely that

he would increase his donations, not to be outshined by a fourteen year old wizard. No matter who had more resources, the real winner would be Cornelius Fudge.

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Harry and Ginny were sitting together on the floor reading in the Gryffindor Common Room right next to the fire. Neville was in an arm chair across the room, finishing his Potions essay and Luna had already returned to the Ravenclaw Common Room for the evening, not wanting to be caught in the corridors past curfew. Ginny turned the page of her book with one hand as she absent mindedly played with Harry's hair. They had done one final run through for the plan to get through the second task but other than that, it was agreed that Harry should take it easy before the tournament. The portrait hole swung open and the three students in the Common Room looked up to see Professor McGonagall standing there with a grim expression on her face.

"There are Miss Weasley, I need to see you in my office, immediately if you please," said Professor McGonagall and Ginny and Harry both stood up. McGonagall was certain that both knew what exactly was up, as they embraced each other, before their lips met. They engaged in that activity for a moment before McGonagall cleared her throat. Both teens broke apart, neither looking embarrassed, but rather annoyed that they had to stop.

"See you after the task, Harry" said Ginny, as she give him another quick kiss good bye, before adjusting the bracelet on her wrist, knowing that it was charmed so only her or Harry could remove it.

"Right Ginny, see you then, don't worry, I'm ready," said Harry and Ginny gave him an encouraging smile, before she allowed Professor McGonagall to lead her off. Harry waited, tomorrow was the day. He already had purchased the Gillyweed that would allow to keep down underneath the water long enough to complete the illusion that hid what he was actually doing.

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Ron Weasley moved his way out to watch the Second Task, but he was looking around for Hermione. He had not seen her all morning at Breakfast. It was not like Hermione to go missing but he expected she would turn up for the Tournament. His eyes moved forward as he watched Harry walk out, along with Neville and that weird Lovegood girl. He wondered where Ginny was, surely she would be walking out to cheer Harry on. It was odd, both Ginny and Hermione missing at the same time. Ron hoped that they did not get into a fight and kill each other. Ron hoped not, but the looks that Hermione had been giving his sister lately had terrified him.

“Ladies and Gentlemen, welcome to the Second Task of the Triwizard Tournament!” boomed the magically amplified voice of Ludo Bagman as it echoed over the crowd. “The four champions are ready, a spell was cast recently, to determine what the champion would miss the most or rather who. Those individuals have been put at the bottom of the lake and the champions will have to retrieve their hostage within sixty minutes. Champions, prepare yourselves, the second task of the Triwizard Tournament is to begin...NOW!”

Ron clutched his hands together. He knew the reason why Hermione was missing right now. She was the thing that Krum would miss the most. To think he idolized that pompous idiot at one point. He was an International Quidditch Star, and he took the one girl that Ron was interested in.

The fact that his sister was also at the bottom of the lake escaped Ron, as he was too distracted by his jealousy. He leaned forward and glared at Krum with utter hatred as he dove into the lake after Hermione.

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Harry was ready, standing at the side of the lake, as he removed the Gillyweed from the pocket of his robes. Quickly, Harry took the Gillyweed and dove in quickly, the gills would take effect in a matter of seconds. The other three champions moved off, as Harry quickly waited for them to go, as he sank into long grass and sent jets of boiling water down to scare any Grindylows out. A few had departed,

as Harry sent a few more jets to give them an added incentive to clear out. Harry settled down, before he set up the illusion spells. The trigger would both activate the Portkey and the illusion that Ginny would replace the actual Ginny as the hostage and then the illusion of Harry would take the quickest, but most realistic, route towards her, while Ginny was safely with him.

“Snape likes pink ponies,” muttered Harry in a serious voice and Ginny appeared right next to him. Relief filled Harry. Harry held her close, her vibrant red hair flipped back and forth in the water. She was put in an enchanted sleep and unaware of what was going on around her. Her eyes were blank and Harry tried not to look at them. They were usually so full of life, it pained Harry to look at Ginny in this state. He held Ginny, as he waited, concealed in the grass, for the illusions to get back. When they returned, they could return to the surface and out of the cold water.

Just as quickly as Harry voiced the thoughts, the two illusions made their way passing through Harry and Ginny before they faded. This allowed Harry to rise up out of the water, with Ginny in his arms. The moment they passed over water, her eyes opened.

“I told you would get me out safe,” said Ginny, leaning her head in Harry’s chest, as Harry carried her over from the lake, across the field.

“Once again the youngest champion is the one to conclude the task the quickest!” cheered Bagman, who was sincerely happy as he had a lot riding on this. “Un-believable!”

“No, just very draining,” said Harry, as he gently sat Ginny down on the bench, before he collapsed down himself, as Madam Pomfrey moved over, wrapping blankets around them, as she muttered darkly under her breath about sending students into the cold lake at the end of February. When Pomfrey had forced Pepper-Up potions down their throats, she moved over to await the other champions. Harry grabbed onto Ginny’s hands, to keep himself steady. “Just drained slightly, those illusion spells are draining, it’s the first time I’ve done it myself, normally I have you, Luna, and Neville to help. I’ll be fine, just give me time to rest.”

“I’m just glad you got out of it okay,” said Ginny, as despite the blankets, they still felt a chill after being in the cold water. Moving closely together underneath the blankets had helped matters slightly, but they wished the other champions would hurry up, so they could get into some dry clothes and sit together in front of a nice warm fire. The wind blew against them, causing Ginny to shudder, but Harry wrapped his arms against her waist, holding her tightly.

Krum reappeared from the water lately, dragging Hermione out. Hermione was in a foul mood as she woke up, Krum had apparently ripped a large gash open on her right arm and the hack job he did transfiguring himself into a shark was obvious.

“I am so very sorry Herm-own-ninny,” said Krum in a rough, but apologetic tone of voice.

“Just get me some medical attention, now” said Hermione through gritted teeth as blood dripped from the grass. She watched as Harry and Ginny sat together, both unharmed and the rage in Hermione just began to bubble. It should have been her that was rescued by Harry and instead, Ginny was safe, while her arm was oozing blood. Krum had lead her over, as Pomfrey gasped and for good reason, the gash looked if it was not treated soon, it would get infected.

“Krum shouldn’t have done that,” muttered Ginny. “A bubble headed charm could have worked better that whatever he tried and not injured his hostage.”

“Yeah he’s going to lose points from that,” said Harry, as he watched Ron storm over towards Krum when he spotted that Hermione was hurt. “Oh, look, Ron’s going to get killed by Viktor Krum.”

Ginny just watched the scene that promised to unfold but apparently Ron was shooed away from Madam Pomfrey before he could make too much of a scene, as she treated Hermione’s arm.

“Yeah, Ron, your little sister is just fine, thanks for asking,” said Ginny, as she watched Ron but another cold wind had caused shivers, causing Harry to pull her in more tightly and put a mild warming charm on the blanket. The spell would only last for about five minutes

and once again, was tiring to perform, but hopefully all the champions should have been out of the lake by then.

Sure enough, seconds later, Cedric reappeared from the lake, with Cho. They both to be shaken up and Cedric limped slightly, but other than that, they were okay. Everyone watched the Lake in anticipation, waiting for the final champion to emerge. They continued to wait and about ten minutes after Cedric reappeared, Fleur reappeared from the lake, in a horrified state. A Grindylow was attached to her ankle, her robes were ripped slightly, and her face and hands were covered in cuts.

“Ze Grindylows attacked me, Gabrielle, I could not get to her in time,” wailed Fleur in a horrified tone, as the Grindylow had finally let go of her ankle, with the Beuxbatons champion collapsing to the ground.

“Why would the Grindylows go after her like that?” whispered Ginny as she saw the state Fleur was in.

“She’s a quarter Veela and Grindylows see Veelas as threats to them, so I’m pretty sure you can figure out what happened,” said Harry as Fleur continued to wail about someone called Gabrielle, who Harry figured was her sister or someone close to her. Obviously, it would be foolish to put the hostages in any real danger, especially foreign hostages. It could cause an international incident and sure enough, Dumbledore made his way into the lake. Luna, Neville, Ginny, and Harry had all come to the conclusion that the part of the song about the hostage not coming back would just ensure the champions worked hard to get to them within the hour. Seconds later, he reappeared with an eight year old girl that looked like a miniature version of Fleur, who woke up, looking fearful and numb, as she shivered. Fleur rushed over and hugged her as Dumbledore rejoined the other judges. Harry had just noticed for the first time that Percy had replaced Mr. Crouch as the judge for this task. This just added the strange situation involving Crouch.

After some very heated debate between the judges, Bagman had returned to address the crowd.

“We have decided to award the points out of fifty, after receiving a report from the mer-people down there” said Bagman. “First, Harry Potter was the first to return, in under fifteen minutes. We are informed that he seamlessly made his way through all obstacles through the lake, reaching his hostage before any of the other champions came close. As a result, Harry has received only the fifth perfect score in the entire history of the Triwizard Tournament, fifty points!”

The crowd cheered loudly, this lead along with what he achieved during the first task put Harry strongly in the lead. He saw that Karkaroff looked very sour, but even he had to concede that Harry should have gotten full marks.

“Great job Harry!” praised Ginny as she grabbed Harry and pulled him into a deep kiss. It had momentarily caused Harry to forget about the cold eating through the air around him. The rest of the tournament participants had their scores announced, but Harry found himself too preoccupied to care. The two slowly broke apart, the taste of each other still fresh in their mouths, as they watched as the students began to file back into the school.

“So, ready to get inside, out of this freezing weather?” asked Harry, as he saw Ginny shiver slightly.

“You don’t have to ask me twice,” responded Ginny with a laugh, as they got up, before she leaned to the side, whispering in Harry’s ear. “Although I might have to have some help getting out of these damp clothes, but I’m sure you’ll have no problem helping me do that.”

Harry nodded, as they walked into the school wrapped in the blanket, as he was in the lead of the Triwizard Tournament by a significant margin.

And there’s the second task, which puts us closer to the big finale for the fourth year as reality splinters further away from the comforting familiarity of canon, especially in the next chapter.

Chapter Ten: Spring

Despite the fact that the Triwizard Tournament's second task had concluded, with Harry having a distinctive lead, he could not afford to let up on his training. The third task, which at this point was unknown, was likely to be the more difficult task. They had very little to go on with what the Tournament was, other than Bagman was going to tell all four champions what it was going to be, about a month or so before it happened. Until then all Harry could do was practice any spell he could learn for the Tournament. He was facing the mostly great unknown for the time being.

Recently, they had been focusing on silent spell casting. Ginny and Harry both managed to light their wands and levitate without speaking, along with partially completing a full body bind. Neville and Luna had managed the lighting, but levitating was a slow process for them. Luna had managed to levitate it for a few seconds, but her concentration had broken and Neville had lifted it an inch. They could only work on this a couple of hours, as other spells needed to be focused on.

Right now, the quartet was enjoying a rare day off without spells. It was Hogsmeade weekend and they made their way towards the edge of the village, after a couple of hours of shopping. Right now, Luna, Neville, and Ginny followed Harry a few steps behind, so they could meet Sirius. They would have gotten there a little sooner, but Hermione and Ron were following them around. A bit of evasive and unconventional maneuvering through the city had caused them to ditch both of them. Using the Invisibility Cloak had helped out a little bit too. Right now, they were on the edge of a tall steep rocky hill with a cave on the top, where a black dog was sitting wagging his tail when he saw Harry approaching.

"Hello, Sirius, good to see you again," said Harry but Sirius had just noticed the three people standing next to Harry. He whined, his head looking from side to side. "Don't worry, Sirius, I trust each and every one of them."

There was a pause for a second before Sirius barked happily and lead them up the hill. It was much easier for Sirius to climb up, but

Luna, Neville, Ginny, and Harry managed to respectively keep up the pace as they reached higher towards their destination. As they reached the top, Harry waved his wand to check for monitoring spells. Once he had discovered some placed on strategic parts of the cave, Harry removed his wand from his sleeve.

“Obsurdesco,” muttered Harry as low he could speak, from as far away from the cave as he could master, pointing his wand towards the walls of the cave. Everyone looked at him but he waved them inside the cave, as it was safe to speak.

Once they were inside, Sirius had turned into a man, looking a bit worn and tired.

“What was the deal with the sound masking spell, Harry?” asked Sirius. “More importantly, where did you learn the sound masking spell? That spell is N.E.W.T. level.”

“So I’ve heard,” said Harry dryly. “As for where I learned it, Restricted Section of the library is your friend. Secondly, as to why I’ve used it, I found three sound monitoring charms placed on the cave. Obviously someone wanted to keep tabs on what’s going on in here.”

“But Dumbledore assured me that the cave was perfectly safe,” responded Sirius but Harry just looked at him. “He was the one who suggested it to me.”

“That explains a lot, but I’ll get to that in a minute,” said Harry before he turned to Luna, Neville, and Ginny. “This is Luna Lovegood, Neville Longbottom, and my girlfriend Ginny Weasley.”

“You Potters and your redheads,” muttered Sirius underneath his breath, shaking his head before he snapped his eyes up and looked rather serious. “Pleased to meet all of you.”

“Harry, you never told me your godfather was Stubby Boardman,” interjected Luna in a surprised voice as she looked at Sirius.

“Stubby Boardman?” questioned Harry in a confused voice.

“Lead singer for the Hob-goblins, they broke up thirteen years ago, right before Sirius went to Azkaban oddly enough,” said Ginny. “Makes you think, doesn’t it?”

“One time, we do it one time, and it’s a legend throughout the entire Wizarding World,” said Sirius as Harry, Neville, Luna, and Ginny looked at him. “James had the bright idea that we pose as the Hob-goblins to get free drinks one night, this was before he was married to Lily obviously, otherwise she would have killed him. Well needless to say it worked, until at least we had a few too many drinks and went into the Muggle World. Let’s just say the less said about our night in Muggle jail the better, I never knew there were so many people with the name Bubba. The press had a field day with this and it was a rare moment of amusement in the terror caused by Voldemort. I guess it became even more exaggerated over the years.”

“Ah, glad it could be explained, you were Stubby Boardman for one day,” said Luna triumphantly. “Daddy will be pleased, that one of his stories was actually accurate, that one pops up a couple of times a year in the Quibbler.”

“Well happy to have helped,” said Sirius not quite sure exactly what else to see before he abruptly turned to Harry. “Now Harry, I noticed something when you’ve talked about Dumbledore. It’s like you don’t trust him and I was curious why you don’t.”

“Long story short, Dumbledore’s had a hand in manipulating my entire life since I came to Hogwarts, in fact ever since I was born,” said Harry as he looked at Sirius, who nodded slowly. “Starting with that stupid Prophecy, do you know it Sirius?”

“I know of it, it was the reason that this entire mess with the Secret Keeper started in the first place,” answered Sirius with a nod, as he looked at them all.

“Well, I found out about the Prophecy,” said Harry and Sirius looked surprised. “Mum left me a letter in her vault that mentioned it. Here’s the letter.”

Harry handed Sirius the letter who look it. Reading through, Sirius's eyes widened at several places, also looking very amused at others, as he read the letter, after a couple of moments, Sirius handed the letter back to Harry, before he took a deep breath.

"The Prophecy, if it's accurate means that only you or Voldemort can kill the other," summarized Sirius. "I've never been one for Divination, but that's how I've read it."

"You and I are on the same wavelength Sirius, not that I want to test out the theory by recklessly putting my life in danger," said Harry.

"That is if the prophecy is true," cautioned Sirius. "It could be relating to a different dark lord, it doesn't specific the seventh month of what year, any number of variables could make it seem like it related to you and Voldemort, but what if it was something different."

"Yes, but the part about being marked as an equal, Harry has the scar, so that could be considered marking," offered Neville who was glad that Voldemort did not interpret him as the threat. It could have just easily been him as the Boy-Who-Lived instead of Harry and he was not sure he could have handled it. In fact, if it was anyone else other than Harry, Neville believed they might just have cracked under the pressure a long time ago.

"True, and the fact Voldemort believes the prophecy to be genuine makes it unlikely that I can just disregard it," said Harry as he put his hand on his head. "All I can do now is learn everything I can, as quickly as I can. At least enough to hold my own, until I'm ready to face Voldemort. Not going to be easy, as he does have over fifty years of magical knowledge over me, including magical information that is rare."

"Right, I agree, it's smart that you're doing that Harry, but something Lily said in the letter really interested me," said Sirius. "It's almost like she's encouraging you to...well overthrow the Ministry and rebuild the Wizarding World."

"Yes, that's actually what I got from that as well," said Harry.

"That explains more than you could ever think Harry," responded Sirius with an amused look. "Lily always got upset when James talked about how you were going to be a great Quidditch Player, saying that there is no way your going to take any Bludgers to the head and ruin your brain before you achieve full potential. She was always not that comfortable around Dumbledore, but she put up with him for James's sake. She did mention one time, about a week before they were killed, that Voldemort would not have come to power if someone had done something sooner and Dumbledore waited too long to do anything."

"I can see where she was coming from, there hard to be signs that Voldemort were there, but Dumbledore might have been afraid to take a more heavy handed approach with him," said Ginny. "The problem with Dumbledore is he always toes a certain line, he values his reputation too much and doesn't want to rock anything too much."

"Not to mention he doesn't want blood on his hands, at least directly," replied Harry. "He wanted to make me into a martyr to face off against Voldemort and would have gotten away with it, had I not wised up. Now, if I face Voldemort, both of my eyes are open and I'll beat him, but it will be on my own terms."

"And the fact that Lily said that Dumbledore was in the switch confused me, because I don't remember him knowing," answered Sirius with a frown.

"Unless he modified your memory," suggested Luna and the others looked up at each other, before nodding.

"That sounds like something Dumbledore would do, come to think of it," said Sirius with a bit of bitterness in his voice. "He didn't do anything to get me a trial, the Ministry thought his word was good enough, not that it would have mattered to Crouch anyway, he was at worst them. It's lucky I caught him on a goody day. Otherwise, he might had the Dementors kiss me right away."

Sirius shuddered and he was not the only one, but Harry remembered something that he wanted Sirius's opinion on.

"Sirius, I've been using the Map lately a lot and it looks like Crouch has been sneaking around the school, he's been in Snape's office at least twice and ingredients have been missing," said Harry and Sirius paused, before responding.

"Considering Crouch has been absent from the Ministry for at least three months, that's odd," commented Sirius with a frown. "Especially the fact that Crouch never gets ill. Never, when his wife died, he made sure to arrange the funeral on a day that he was off, and now, he's missed three straight months. I'd like to say that overwork has finally gotten to him and he's snapped, but up until he disappeared, there were no warning signs at what happened. He just stopped going to work one day."

"Accordingly to Percy, he's sending instructions, but that can be faked," said Ginny. "Still it doesn't explain why he's sneaking around Hogwarts."

"No it doesn't," agreed Harry. "Unless Crouch was put under the Imperius Curse and then attacked Moody, before using the Polyjuice Potion, which is the theory we've come up with. The fact that Moody, who may actually be Crouch, keeps helping me and the ingredients missing from Snape's office really add to this. In addition to the vision I had where Voldemort told Wormtail to arrange for Crouch to not go to the Ministry, because his presence there was a liability, really just adds even more questions but I'm pretty sure this is the most plausible explanation."

"Yes, I suppose there's a chance, but there's so much that can go wrong with that," said Sirius. "If Crouch breaks the curse, if he's Moody, it could lead to some seriously complications. I think there is much more to this than we're seeing. Voldemort's obviously pulling the strings and no matter who put your name in the hat is working with him, whether it's willingly or not, well I don't think so. Maybe Karkaroff is in on this as well."

"No, I don't think so, Harry and I overheard a conversation between him and Snape on Christmas," said Ginny. "Karkaroff seemed very worried about something and from what they were saying, it was about Voldemort. It didn't seem too staged as well."

"Well, Ginny, Karkaroff's a good actor, he got himself out of Azkaban and all those people in, made a lot of people think he had a change of heart," remarked Sirius.

"Be that as it may no one is that good, not even Karkaroff," argued Harry. "Possible yes, but I don't know, it just seems like he's being genuine and afraid of Voldemort returning. I don't think he's in on this, it just doesn't make sense."

"Pieces of the puzzle are missing, we have a good amount of it, but nothing to tie everything together," said Luna. "Crouch, Moody, Voldemort, Polyjuice Potion and the Tournament all go together somehow, but how? If we can figure out what exactly ties this all together, then we know what's right or wrong."

"Good solid evidence is what we need, but how," said Ginny. "After all these thefts, I don't think Snape will let anyone near his private stores. Dumbledore won't do anything, Harry's already said the Ministry has offered to investigate, but it was shut down. All the evidence from there is lost."

"Looks like unless we luckily stumble into something, everything is lost," said Harry. "Sirius?"

"Yes, I think so Harry, the Marauder's Map is your best bet, but I can see why you don't want the Ministry to know about that, they're think it's dangerous and confiscate it," said Sirius. "As I told Remus when I stopped by on my way here, the best bet is to keep your head up and train hard for the Tournament. Your mother said it best, learned everything you can."

"I am, don't worry Sirius, we've been studying as much as we can, both for this Tournament and whatever happens later," said Harry. "How is Lupin by the way?"

"He says he's well, but unemployment has hit him hard, and the lack of the Wolfbane Potion, well after having it for an entire year, it makes the transformations more painful after being taken off of it," answered

Sirius darkly. "I didn't know about it, until I managed to get it out of him, otherwise I would have had it made for him."

"That's not a good idea Sirius, considering the Ministry is out for you, but maybe there's something I can do," cautioned Harry as Sirius looked at him to protest, but a stern look had stopped him. "With all the gold I've have, I can afford to have a world class Potions master make the potion and get it to Remus once a month."

"Let me know if there is anything that I can do to help," offered Sirius.

"I'll take care of it, Sirius, until we get Wormtail, you might be cleared of the betrayal charge, but until we get him, they still think you killed him and all of those Muggles, regardless of who the Secret Keeper is," said Harry. "So lay low and once I get past this Tournament, I'll be able to worry about Wormtail."

"Right Harry, don't worry about me, just get through the Tournament," said Sirius as they moved towards the edge of the cave, it was getting late and they needed to get back. Not to mention the fact that the sound blocking charms would fade, leaving the monitoring spells wide open in a matter of moments. "I think I'll breathe easier when this tournament is done and over with."

"I think we all will, Sirius," answered Harry, as they made their way from the cave and back down into the village, so they could go back into the school.

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The following Friday, in the Great Hall, Harry had just completed a hurried breakfast. He had walked forward, something had tasted a bit off about the pumpkin juice. Ginny was talking to Luna as he moved out into the Great Hall. Neville was right behind Harry but Hermione had swerved right in front of him.

"HARRY!" called Hermione as she moved towards Harry and Harry was taken aback, but he stopped.

"May I help you?" asked Harry coolly.

“Actually, Harry, I’m here to help you,” said Hermione brightly as she stepped closer to Harry. Any second right now, it would be taken effect and Harry would be saved from Ginny. It might put him in a slightly mindless state but it was for his own good.

“What do you mean by that?” asked Harry as he about gagged on how strong Hermione’s perfume was. It was odd that she was coming up to him on this very morning and when the pumpkin juice had a peculiar taste.

“Harry...” started Ginny as she rushed up to the scene before her eyes locked onto Hermione. “What are you doing here?”

“Actually, I was just talking to Harry, I think he’s about to see the error in his ways,” responded Hermione as she edged closer to Harry. Harry leaned forward, looking into her eyes, she had almost had him, but his will was too strong. He was able to gather exactly what Hermione did and how she did it. In fact, her mind was so easily organized it was easy to see what exactly Hermione did.

“Hermione, I’ve wanted to tell you this for a very long time,” said Harry in a dreamy voice and Hermione looked smug as she looked at Ginny, who just leaned forward. “Hermione...did you really think a love potion would have any effect on me when I could throw off the Imperius Curse?”

“Love Potion!” shouted Ginny angrily, as she spun towards Hermione, who backed off. She remembered what happened the last time Ginny’s rage was directed at her. Her jaw ached in the memory of it. Ginny moved forward, as she pulled out her wand and aimed it towards Hermione. Just when she thought Hermione could not go any lower, she had surprised her.

“What is the meaning of this?” demanded Professor Snape as he stepped into the hallway, followed by Professor McGonagall and Professor Dumbledore.

“Why don’t you ask Granger?” asked Ginny. “She can tell you how she’s been brewing up love potions.”

"Love potions?" demanded McGonagall as she looked at Hermione, who was sweating, under pressure. "Is that true, Miss Granger?"

Hermione looked nervous and seemed to be physically unable to answer any questions.

"There's only one way to find out, I shall retrieve Mr. Potter's cup from the Gryffindor Table and check it for foreign substances," said Snape before he paused, sniffing the air. "Although that diluted love potion that she put into her perfume might be a good enough indication to give her away."

"Miss Granger, you are to come with us to my office," said Dumbledore in a commanding tone and Hermione nodded, it was obvious that she had made a judgment of error. "Miss Weasley, Mr. Potter, I would suggest you get to class, don't worry about this, we'll settle it out."

"Of course, Professor," said Harry as Ginny nodded right beside his side, as she held Harry's hand, as Hermione was lead off, sobbing slightly, at the fact that the plan she had worked on for two months. Everyone was wrong, she was supposed to be with Harry, Harry was supposed to turn to her when he was in trouble. When he needed help, Hermione was supposed to be there for Harry, not Ginny. Now, because of Ginny's corrupting influence, Harry was lost to her forever. Where could she have gone wrong?

"So you can throw off the effects of the love potion?" asked Ginny. "Did you know you could do that?"

"No not until today, but it really does make sense if I can throw off the Imperius, a love potion, even one brewed by Hermione, could be no problem," responded Harry as he looked into Ginny's eyes. "Besides I have the most beautiful girl in the world anyway, why would I be swayed by a love potion?"

"Good point, Harry," said Ginny with a laugh, before they kissed briefly before they had to break apart. "We'll finish this after class."

“Agreed,” said Harry with a grin but he vowed to find a charm to check his drinks and food for foreign substances in the future. It was quite lucky that it was only a love potion, instead of something a bit more deadly. It would not happen again and it had just reminded Harry of what potential dangers had lurked out there. Still, he had the thoughts of spending some quality time with Ginny after class and he could really care less what would happen to Hermione.

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Hermione sat in Dumbledore’s office, a scared look on her face, as Snape had just completed the test of the remaining pumpkin juice. Dumbledore and McGonagall awaited the result of Snape’s test.

“It may be a surprise that one of our precious Gryffindors would indulge in such a heinous act, but in fact, Miss Granger did use love potion as Mr. Potter accused, I am more curious as to why Mr. Potter managed to be immune to the effects,” stated Snape as he turned to Dumbledore, with a nod, as if waiting for a theory.

“The reason that Mr. Potter managed to avoid the effects of the love potion is not important right now, Severus,” said Dumbledore, as he looked at Hermione behind his spectacles, who looked at Dumbledore with a terrified expression on her face. “Why did you do it, Miss Granger?”

“Harry needs me!” shouted Hermione finding her voice.

“He seems to be getting on fine without you,” said Snape swiftly as he looked at Hermione, an unsympathetic look on his face, despite the fact she seemed really upset. “I do not care to hear of your teen angst, Miss Granger, but is quite obvious that ever since Mr. Potter has cut his ties from you and Mr. Weasley, his performance in my class has raised significantly. It’s obvious that you need Potter, as making Weasley feel inferior is like kicking a coma patient in the head...”

“Severus,” warned Dumbledore, as his eyes twinkled briefly, before they turned onto Hermione. “Why did you do it, Miss Granger?”

“Ginny doesn’t really know Harry, we were supposed to be together since my first year, but she had to get in the way,” said Hermione in a frustrated voice. “Harry’s confused about everything, because of his upbringing, he doesn’t know what love really is, I was supposed to show him...”

“No, what you would have gotten had you succeeded was a puppet, Miss Granger,” said McGonagall sternly. “Perhaps if you truthfully knew Mr. Potter, you would know he would not appreciate that much.”

“He’ll learn to live with it,” said Hermione, without thinking what she was saying and Dumbledore looked at Hermione, without any humor in his eyes. Hermione awaited the word of the Headmaster.

“No matter what your intentions were, the fact that using love potions are forbidden at Hogwarts,” said Dumbledore. “Under normal circumstances, you would be expelled, but considering the potion was not successful in working, I can only opt for a less severe punishment and you should count yourself lucky Miss Granger that your wand was not snapped.”

Hermione sat, as she waited what punishment Dumbledore would give her. This was all Ginny’s fault, if she had not taken Harry from her, this would not have happened at all. Her entire life was falling apart.

“Miss Granger, you very nearly had one of the Gryffindor prefect spots locked in, but in light of your actions today, I have no choice but to ban you from ever becoming prefect or Head Girl in this school,” said Dumbledore and Hermione’s eyes were filled with absolute horror, but Dumbledore was far from finished in giving out her punishment. “To further impress upon you the seriousness of what you have done, you will have detention every night for the rest of this year with Professor Snape. Furthermore, your time in the library will be limited to two hours a night.”

“Professor, please, only two hours, I don’t think I can...” stated Hermione in a horrified voice but Snape had interrupted her.

“Miss Granger, I can assure you that students have gotten adequate grades in the past without living in the library, I’m sure you can do the same,” said Snape dry, unsympathetic voice as Hermione glared at him angrily. “You should be thanking the Headmaster on a bended knee, by all rights, you should be expelled.”

Hermione sat there, wondering where everything had gone wrong. Her entire world had shattered right around her. It was bad enough that Harry had surpassed her in half of the classes and now she would lose precious time in the library thanks to Ginny. She remained sitting there, in one morning, she had lost everything. Her dream was to become prefect and later Head Girl, but now, that was lost. It might have been almost worth it had she had Harry but Ginny had taken that away from her. Hermione nearly regretted shunning Harry after his name had come out of the Goblet of Fire, but she remembered that it was for Harry’s own good. Now, all she had was Ron, and even their friendship was strained to the barest minimum. All Ron and her did was fight, even more than they ever had when Harry was with them. She had never hated anyone in her life more than she had hated Ginny Weasley, this was all her fault.

“Miss Granger, I believe you have Professor Flitwick for your next period,” said Dumbledore as he broke the silence and Hermione responded by nodding numbly. “Very well, Professor McGonagall will escort you to that class and explain to Professor Flitwick why you are late. You are dismissed.”

“Yes, Professor,” said Hermione as she turned, cringing at the disappointed look McGonagall had given her had really cut deeply. Without talking or even acknowledge her presence, McGonagall walked forward, as Hermione followed her, knowing full well that the rumors of what she tried to do would spread throughout the school by now and would have been blown out of proportion as well.

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In the middle of May, Harry made his way out to the Quidditch Field, where Ludo Bagman had wanted to meet the champions to tell them what was going on for the third task. Luna, Neville, and Ginny waited for Harry underneath the Invisibility Cloak at the edge of the field, as

the other three champions stood, patiently, acknowledging Harry with the briefest of nods as Bagman stood at the edge of the field, projecting his usual overblown cartoon character image. Harry paused, his eyes widened as he stepped back, the Quidditch Field had been grown with very tall hedges, hedges that even Hagrid would have trouble seeing over.

“The champions are all here!” shouted Bagman gleefully as he looked at the four champions. “Now, as you can see, we’ve made some modifications for the Quidditch field, so can any of you guess what we have in mind for the third and final task?”

“Maze,” said Krum simply, as if this was the most obvious thing in the world.

“Right-o, it’s a maze!” shouted Bagman in an excited voice, as if he just became Minister of Magic. “The final task is straight forward, whoever gets through the maze first and gets the Triwizard Cup in the center the maze. Obvious, Mr. Potter will start, because he’s in the lead, then Mr. Krum, Mr. Diggory, and Miss Delacour, in this final task in the Triwizard Tournament.”

“We simply have to get through ze maze,” said Fleur skeptically.

“Well there will be obstacles of course and Hagrid will be applying a number of creatures that you’ll have to go through,” said Bagman with a smile. “Oh, and thanks to the oversight that came to light during the First Task, the Triwizard Cup will be charmed against being summoned. But it should be a grand old time, shouldn’t it?”

Harry sighed, fighting against any beast that Hagrid was fond of would not be a picnic. There was no trick that would give Harry an easy way to win this task, but he was confident that he would be able to win thanks to the training he had been doing for the past seven months.

“I believe that’s all you need to know, we’ll leave now, so you will be able to get a good night’s sleep so you can start preparing for the final task tomorrow,” said Bagman, as they made their way up to the

castle. Bagman, Krum, Fleur, and Cedric all walked up, leaving Harry to walk over, to Luna, Neville, and Ginny.

"Maze, that was a bit better than we could have hoped for," said Luna.

"Yeah, should be no problem Harry, I mean you are in the lead," added Neville.

"I think you're do good Harry, but this is the final task and the best chance for someone to hurt you , the last chance too," said Ginny, as she held the cloak for Harry to get underneath it but a thump echoed from past the gates. The quartet paused and another thump, before a malnourished form of a human being stumbled forward, staggering, before it dropped to the ground. Quickly, the group took a few steps, before Luna and Ginny reached forward to roll the man over, so they could see his face.

"Crouch!" gasped Neville in a shocked voice, as they all backed off, as Crouch twitched, before he sat up, and leaned against the tree, a vapid, lifeless look etched in his eyes.

"Harry Potter...Dumbledore...warn them...Dark Lord...stronger...Dark Lord...returning...Pettigrew...my son...fake Moody...warn them...too late...third task," slurred Crouch. "Not going to happen...grave mistake...doomed us all...return...Voldemort...return...Pettigrew...Dark Lord...not dead...alive."

"Mr. Crouch calm down, you're not making any sense," said Harry as he looked at the babbling man, who looked from side to side wildly.

"Must warn Harry Potter...blood ritual...resurrection....dummy cup," said Crouch as his eyes moved back and forth.

"What's this?" asked a voice, as a clunking of a leg moved forward and Neville, Luna, Harry, and Ginny turned to see, Mad-Eye Moody, walking forward. "Crouch!"

Moody surveyed Crouch, who was humming under his breath, obviously rather mad.

"You four get up to the school, it's obvious that Crouch is mad and possibly dangerous, but I should be able to handle anything he might do," ordered Moody roughly and they backed off.

"STAY AWAY FROM ME!" shouted Crouch, as Moody approached him, he sounded coherent for the briefest second. "No...not you...Dumbledore...away...no...leave."

"Take it easy, old man, I'm going to give you something to relieve your misery," muttered Moody as he removed a vial of potion from the pocket of his robe.

Under the Cloak, Ginny looked at the Marauder's Map, eyes widened.

"Uh, Harry," hissed Ginny, and Harry turned to see Bartemius Crouch standing right in front of Bartemius Crouch.

"Okay, can anyone explain this to me?" asked Harry and the others looked as baffled as he did as they watched Moody approach Crouch. "Stunning spells at the ready, aim for the Crouch posing as Moody. "

"STUPEFY!" shouted the four in unison as four spells whizzed through the air. They slammed against "Moody", knocking him to the ground. His magic eye had popped out, spinning on the ground as it came to a spun and a vial of potion in his hand shattered. It burned through the grass, leaving a miniature smoking black hole into the ground.

"Ginny and I will stay here, you two get Dumbledore, despite everything else, he might want to know about his Defense Against the Dark Arts teacher being a Polyjuice double," said Harry to Neville and Luna who nodded, before they made their way up to the school. Harry and Ginny stood next to each other, wands steady, just in case the faux Moody had an accomplice.

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At a Ministry of Magic interrogation room, the imposter Mad-Eye Moody was chained to a chair, with Fudge, Amelia Bones, and

Dumbledore standing around him, as his features began to turn back to normal.

“Crouch was taken to St. Mungos,” commented Fudge, as he waited for the imposter Moody to turn back to normal. “His brain has been damaged permanently from overexposure to the Imperius Curse, the poor devil. He’s been giving medication to stabilize him, so he doesn’t shout incoherent nonsense and disturb the other patients.”

At that instant, Moody had turned to normal and the three faces grew in shock.

“Bartemius Crouch Junior!” shouted Fudge in surprise. “But how...”

“The truth potion will take effect now, so we’ll know,” said Madam Bones evenly.

“How did you fake your own death?” asked Dumbledore.

“I’m the Minister here, Dumbledore, I’ll lead this interrogation,” said Fudge shortly as he cleared his throat before he turned to the younger Crouch. “How did you fake your own death?”

“It was my mother’s idea, she loved me, even through my father could never be bothered with me, but she was too weak to oppose him, so I was forced to find my real family with the Death Eaters,” said Crouch in a blank voice. “Be that as it may, she persuaded my father to smuggle me out, used Polyjuice Potion to switch us, she died under my appearance and I lived as a mindless zombie, under the Imperius Curse. My father refused to let me breath, the house elf Winky was my only link to the outside world. Until one day, no one knew of my existence.”

“Who learned of your existence?” asked Fudge.

“Bertha Jorkins, a Ministry worker in my father’s department, she came by with paperwork but she overheard a conversation between myself and Winky, she guessed who it was and confronted my father, obviously intended blackmail. Nosy busy body, she met a bloody end, thankfully,” said Crouch with a chuckle. “Naturally, father wiped her

memory, a little too well as she was never the same. There was only one time everything was close to being ruined. It was during the Quidditch Cup final. I sat in the seats and the cheering of the crowd, the noise, the fact my father's attention was elsewhere perhaps, it had lifted the Curse from me and I was free. I grabbed the wand from the pocket of Harry Potter and planned my escape."

"But, you sent the Dark Mark up into the skies," prodded Bones.

"I did, to send a message to that trash that dare dress in the clothes of my master, the Dark Lord," said Crouch. "They are nothing but parasites, the real followers were imprisoned or died in the name of serving the Dark Lord. It was an error in judgment sending that Dark Mark. I was nearly caught but my father played dumb. Winky took the fall, someone had to and it sure wasn't going to be my father. I thought for sure my father was going to kill me right then and there. I mean, I was already dead, so why did it matter? Then, he showed up."

"Who is he?" demanded Fudge.

"The Dark Lord," answered Crouch with a bit of glee in his voice. "In the arms of his servant Wormtail."

"Rubbish, You-Know-Who is dead," interjected Fudge, as he waved his wand and put Crouch in a mild sleep. "I can see what has happened, this man was obviously damaged from overexposure to the Imperius Curse and was working on the orders of someone who he believed to be You-Know-Who. Actually, he was a delusion crafted by an unstable mind."

"Can we be for certain?" asked Bones skeptically. "He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named disappeared after that night, but there was no mind found."

"The magical backlash destroyed it, the Unspeakables studied it in great detail, the official Ministry of Magic word is that he's dead" said Fudge stubbornly.

"The thing is, even the greatest studies can be mistaken, Voldemort could still be out there in some form," responded Dumbledore.

"Dumbledore, you're not in the best standing after what we've learned today, you allowed a delusional crack pot teach at your school for a year, without even noticing," said Fudge. "I may excuse you slightly because you did hire Moody and the difference would be miniscule, but Moody should not have been hired in the first place. I fear you're losing your grip on your ability to properly run the school."

"I assure you, my grip on Hogwarts is as strong as ever Cornelius, it was an unfortunate oversight on my part, it will not happen again," said Dumbledore calmly.

"It had best not, I will give you one final chance, Albus," said Fudge. "If you slip up again, the Ministry will be making changes in Hogwarts and those changes will not involve you."

"Awaken Crouch, please, Minister," said Madam Bones, quickly before things really blew up between Fudge and Dumbledore, fearing that it would distract them from the matter at hand. "I have a few more questions that I need to ask, other than the supposed delusion of He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named."

"Of course, Amelia," said Fudge as he did what she had asked.

"What happened to the real Alastor Moody?" asked Madam Bones.

"He's alive, kept in his trunk, put under the Imperius Curse to help me maintain the charade," said Crouch. "The keys are in the right drawer of his desk, they will open the trunk."

"Did you put Harry Potter in the Triwizard Tournament?" asked Madam Bones.

"Yes, I did, but he's doing much better than I expected, the foolish boy is going to play into the hands of the Dark Lord and finally meet his doom," responded Crouch as Fudge rolled his eyes at further talk of the Dark Lord.

“Enough, I believe we know everything we need to know,” answered Fudge, who intended to tell Harry everything once they had their next meeting, because he was certain that Dumbledore would not. “Amelia, sign the order, Bartemius Crouch Junior will receive the Dementor’s Kiss effective immediately. He’s a danger to himself and others and must be dealt with.”

“Right Minister,” said Bones in a resigned voice as Dumbledore looked unhappy. Fudge was being very short sighted; he would have liked to question Crouch more about what Voldemort was up to, so he could modify his plans for Harry accordingly. But, the Minister’s mind was already made up, as two Aurors were called in, as they escorted the younger Crouch out, where he would receive the kiss immediately.

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Wormtail walked forward nervously, facing an arm chair. A great snake slithered on the floor and looked at Wormtail like it would prefer to eat him for dinner.

“What is it Wormtail?” asked a cold hiss from the arm chair. Wormtail shivered but he stood up straight to address the source of the voice.

“My Lord, it’s Crouch, he is to receive the Dementor’s Kiss, it may have already happened” said Wormtail slowly, as he closed his eyes, to brace for impact. “My Lord?”

“I heard you, Wormtail,” said the voice softly. “One month before my grand resurrection, Crouch gets himself caught, by four mere children. I have heard the details over the Wireless, it is for the best that he does not remain alive to further muddle my plans but one thing is for certain. It will not end like this, I have worked too long. An entire year’s work will not be wasted because of one moment of stupidity.”

“What are we going to do now, my Lord?” asked Wormtail. “Crouch is done, soulless. You have no followers that you can count on that knows of your existence.”

“Be that may, I do have you, Wormtail, no matter how depressing that may sound,” hissed the voice, before giving a cold high laugh that

caused Wormtail to shudder. "You will conclude Crouch's mission Wormtail, I don't care how, as long as the end result is as we planned."

"Of course, my Lord, I'll do it, you can count on me," said Wormtail nervously as prepared to leave the room.

"And Wormtail?" prompted the voice, and Wormtail turned to listen closely. "Fail and it will be your head."

Chapter Eleven: Maze

“So you don’t have to worry about Barty Crouch Junior any longer Harry,” explained Fudge as Harry was in the Minister’s office a few weeks before the Triwizard Tournament. “He’s been given the Dementor’s Kiss, it is quite unfortunate what Crouch did what he did to his son. Both of them are damaged and deranged, Crouch is still alive, but perhaps it will be kinder to put him out of his misery. He did assist with breaking his son out of Azkaban, so that will be grounds for a Dementor’s Kiss.”

“If you feel is necessary Minister, then the power is in your hands,” said Harry evasively, as he was thinking about what Crouch said. Crouch babbled for certain, but some of the babble made sense. Most likely, about Voldemort getting stronger, as it appeared that Voldemort was getting stronger. The Occlumency training had gotten Harry up to the point where his scar had barely hurt but he could still see a faded version of the dreams. Everything that had happened this year had been a well orchestrated plan to bring Voldemort back to full power. With Crouch captured, the plans were stalled at best, ruined at worst. Harry could not really tell the end of the dream, which was a bad thing for once. He had a feeling he missed something vital.

“Thanks for the blessing Harry, Dumbledore protested it, he seems to think that You-Know-Who will return,” answered Fudge with a sad shake of his head. “It’s just like that rubbish with the Philosopher’s Stone, Quirell most likely had been dabbling in some strange, foreign dark magic and went insane, thinking that He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named was giving him instructions to give him the Philosopher’s Stone. Of course, I don’t think it was a good idea to put the Stone in the school in the first place.”

“Not to mention the fact that the Stone was only protected by traps that first year students could get through,” muttered Harry under his breath and Fudge looked at him. “Sorry, Minister, just thinking out loud.”

“No Harry, I agree with you, they should have been protected with something more complex that first years, including one muggleborn, should not have gotten through,” answered Fudge with a shake of his

head. "Dumbledore's grip on everything has been slipping over the last few years, especially during this school year. If he would have allowed us a full investigation from the start, we could have thrown out your entry in the Triwizard Tournament. By the time you completed the first task it was too late."

"You mean I could have gotten out of the Tournament, if Crouch would have been discovered early?" asked Harry.

"Naturally, it's in the Triwizard rulebook," said Fudge calmly.

"Something that I've never seen," muttered Harry and Fudge looked scandalized at the very thought of a champion not having access to the rules.

"Dumbledore should have given you one the day after the First Task, the heads of the school were obligated to give their champion a copy," replied Fudge with a frown and Harry's eyes widened. "Given by the look on your face, you did not know this."

"Of course, I didn't Minister and I asked Dumbledore for a copy of the rules," said Harry. "Why would Dumbledore refuse to give me something that was rightfully mine?"

"There could be several reasons, but who knows, when Dumbledore's involved, everything's convoluted," said Fudge with a shake of his head and for the first time, he wondered what Dumbledore's intentions towards Harry Potter were. "Too late now, besides you're doing as well as someone in your unfortunate position can be, in fact more so. Congratulations on that by the way Harry."

"Thanks Minister," answered Harry.

"And the Third Task is coming up very soon, I take it?" asked Fudge as Harry nodded. "Young Perry Weatherby is devastated by what happened to his boss so he might not be able to fill in. Considering the fact that he should have been able to determine his superior's author from a fake, he's under a lot of fire, and he might not have a job in the Ministry, much less be able to judge the third task in the Tournament. So, I believe I'll be filling in."

“Really, that’s interesting,” said Harry, who wondered why they needed judges. As far as he could tell, whoever grabbed the cup would get all the points.

“Indeed Harry, but I’m not a judge right now, so I can wish you good luck in the Third Task,” said Fudge.

“Thanks Minister,” answered Harry.

“Don’t mention it Harry, I’ve got to run, meetings, mostly because of the Crouch mess, I’ll leave you to wander around on your own devices,” said Fudge before he paused. “And your latest donation to my reelection fund was very generous. The next year is going to be a pivotal one, I need to make my mark to remain Minister.”

“Happy to be able to help such a brilliant politician, Minister,” said Harry, who could almost feel his nose growing by the moment as he praised Fudge, but it was all for the name of setting up the necessary changes. Fudge had to remain in there, instead of someone who could perhaps detect what he was trying to do. At least for now, there would come a time where Harry would have to cut Fudge’s strings and let him loose. Until now, the bumbling Minister had his uses.

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“What did Crouch mean?” asked Ginny, as they sat in the Room of Requirement after an intense day of training. “Other than the warning about Voldemort, I didn’t understand a word he said.”

“He was trying to give us a warning of some sort, but it didn’t make sense,” said Neville.

“Yes, it seemed like a bunch of random words strung together,” agreed Luna. “Normally I’m good at making sense out of utter nonsense, but this has me a bit baffled.”

“The words, dummy cup keep popping out at me,” answered Harry suddenly. “It could very well be the cup in the center of the maze. But, with Crouch Junior out of the way, whatever plan Voldemort had may

very well be out the window. At least in theory, I would love to say the plan was over.”

“But with Voldemort, you’re saying that he won’t give up,” said Neville.

“Not at the slightest, he’s fanatical, insane, yet one of the smartest students that have ever attended Hogwarts, I don’t think he’s gotten over what happened on that Halloween night,” said Harry, as he rubbed his temple in thought, a grim conclusion of what had to be done. “I can’t avoid it, whatever plan Voldemort has, I might have to go along with it, make him think he’s ensnared me.”

“So much can go wrong, with that Harry,” replied Luna who looked concerned. “He could surprise you.”

“He could, but , he’s at his weakest he’s ever been. Even if he uses me in some dark ritual to return to power, Voldemort could be weakened and it might be the perfect opportunity to end it before it even starts or at least severely weaken him, so he can be set up for a fall when I’m completely ready” answered Harry as Ginny looked at him, before grabbing his hand, to encourage him, even though she felt certain reservations.

“Harry, I understand where you’re coming from,” said Ginny but she gave a small frown. “I’ll be a liar if I said I wasn’t worried, there is so much that can go wrong by willingly stepping into Voldemort’s trap.”

“I know, but if I don’t, I throw away the perfect opportunity to sucker in Voldemort, to lure him into a false sense of security, this is an opportunity to get at him that might not present itself again,” said Harry. “Don’t worry, I have the portkeys, if I’m in the maze for more than an hour, you know what to do.”

“Right, Harry, we have everything ready, a couple of words, and then we can get you out of danger,” said Ginny, as she nodded her head and the others looked more hopeful, they had tools that Voldemort did not know about, that could free Harry in time. “Of course, it might not come to that, whatever backup plan Voldemort has could fail.”

"I hope so, but all I can do is go through the third task, acting like there's nothing up," said Harry with a sigh, once again, it sounded like a stupid idea as he said it, but Voldemort would be too cautious if Harry had easily figure out what he was doing. "I would say not worry about Voldemort right now, but I do worry about him. However, the third task is coming up and there is going to be some obstacles to get through. Who knows what the people in charge of this tournament have put in he maze."

"I see your point Harry," agreed Luna. "He won't be a concern if you fail to make it through the maze. The maze is important first, then Voldemort."

"So, we're going to up on training sessions then," said Ginny.

"I don't know, you all have exams, I don't want to be responsible for you failing," said Harry.

"No, Harry," interjected Neville stubbornly. "Exams won't me anything right now."

"Besides, we'll do well enough in Defense, besides, we've done a fair bit of Charms, Transfiguration, and Potions as well," said Luna calmly, in a reassuring tone of voice. "All that we're learning with you are more useful than anything we can learn in exams."

"Don't worry Harry, this is more important, we'll all do fine, we really should get on some of those advanced techniques against multiple opponents," answered Ginny, as she waved off Harry's protest but they all nodded in agreement. Death Eaters seldom dealt with wizards alone, it was always in teams. Most wizards failed, as they tried to duel straight up, which was a foolish idea against multiple opponents, as a straight up duel required the attention to be placed on one opponent. To face multiple opponents, creative maneuvering was just as important as magic.

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The real Mad-Eye Moody was back after a trip to the hospital wing. He was very jumpy. Then again anyone would be after they had been

locked in their own trunk for several months. Dumbledore had postponed Defense Against the Dark Arts classes for the remainder of the year, it would not be good publicity if an super paranoid Moody hexed a student for breathing wrong and it could not find anyone to fill in on short notice. Still, Dumbledore kept Moody around, to help patrol the maze for the Triwizard Tournament, but until then, he left Moody in a spare office with no windows and a door with three locks on it.

“I believe the maze is all in order,” said Dumbledore, as they looked at the blueprint of the maze. Fudge, Madam Maxime, Karkaroff, and Bagman all leaned forward, it was the night before the third task of the Triwizard Tournament. Each of the traps were marked and a tap of the wand revealed instructions on how to defuse them. Every judge, along with the teachers patrolling the outside of the maze, would receive a copy of the map. It was already agreed that with the security breach involving the Death Eater, that it might not be for the best idea to invite the families of the competing champions to watch the Tournament. While there were hours of debate, the Minister was insistent that it was for the best to limit the amount of outsiders inside the school for the tournament.

“I have a concern, Dumbledore,” said Fudge with a frown as he studied the map intently, before he focused on one place. . “The quicksand trap on the fourth right turn. That might be a bit too dangerous for our champions. I’d say eliminate it.”

“Minister, I believe each and every one of the champions can defuse it, with a solidification charm, it is taught during the sixth year, or at least it is at Durmstrang,” said Karkaroff as he twirled his goatee and Fudge opened his mouth. “Yes, I realize our accidental champion might not know it, but if he runs into it, I’m afraid he’ll have to forfeit the final task, giving someone more competent the victory.”

“Yes, unfortunately, Harry will have to find a way around it or he’ll have to send the sparks up for someone to bail him out,” said Bagman in a despondent voice, he could not very well reveal that he had a bet on Harry with the goblins, that he had more than gold riding on.

“Very well, leave it, but if anyone gets hurt, I will be certain to point out that I was against it,” remarked Fudge swiftly. “Now does anyone else have any objections to the obstacles in the tournament?”

Everyone shook their heads, they felt the champions would be able to deal with them all or be able to send for help, before there was too much problem. The five judges sat, as the Triwizard Cup was sitting on a table. Little did they know, a fat grey rat, with a toe missing, moved from the shadows, as it scurried up the edge of the table, moving towards the Triwizard Cup.

“Very well, if there are not any more objections, than we must place the Cup in the center of the maze, before bringing all of the traps out of stasis,” said Dumbledore, as the rat crawled down into the cup, unknowingly to the Triwizard judges. “Mr. Bagman, would you please bring the cup out into the center of the maze?”

“It would be an honor, Headmaster,” said Bagman in a cheerful voice, as he moved over, and he picked up the Triwizard Cup without looking at it. Bagman walked out, leading the way, as he held the map that would direct him into the center of the maze. The other four judges followed, as they moved outside towards the Quidditch Field. Bagman walked into the center of the maze, walking directly towards the center of the maze. Without a word, he placed down the cup, and walked out of the maze. Once he exited the maze, he turned towards Fudge, Dumbledore, Maxime, and Karkaroff stood outside of the maze. “Okay, gentlemen and lady, the cup is in the center of the maze, ready to go for the champions tomorrow.”

“Very well then, let us activate the perils in the maze and then we’ll get some sleep, tomorrow will be an important day, we need to keep our wits about ourselves, ” said Dumbledore, as they all nodded, for once all five judges were in total agreement.

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In the center of the maze, the grey rat exited the inside of the cup. It dropped down to the ground, before he transformed into the form of Wormtail. Wormtail looked around, hearing nothing. Quickly, he raised his wand and tapped it towards the Portkey. The cup was

illuminated in a blue color and Wormtail nodded, the deed had been done. Quickly, Wormtail transformed back into a rat and moved back towards the school. He had one more trip to make, in the Hufflepuff Common Room, but he knew the fastest way there. His nighttime travels with his former friends had given him intimate knowledge of all of the secrets of Hogwarts School and Witchcraft and Wizardry.

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The school was all abuzz before the final task of the Triwizard Tournament. The first two tasks had been memorable for a number of reasons. The least likely champion had quickly turned into the odds on favorite as the final task was approaching. The entire school was abuzz of what Harry Potter was going to do.

Harry was right outside the maze, a few minutes before the task was to begin. Neville, Luna, and Ginny had just wished him luck for the Tournament and Sirius had sent a message before, telling him to be careful, but wishing him luck none the same. Harry was outside of the maze, he was a bit nervous, but also focused on the task at hand. Thanks to his lead, he had a ten minute lead and he saw McGonagall, Flitwick, Hagrid, and the real Mad-Eye Moody patrolling the perimeter of the maze, ready to help if any champion got in trouble.

“Ladies and Gentlemen welcome to the third and final task of the Triwizard Tournament!” announced Bagman in a booming voice. “The leading champion will enter the maze with a ten minute head start, before the second place runner up enters the champion. Then five minutes later, the third place champion enters and then five minutes after that, the last place champion enters the maze. Whoever gets the cup in the center of the maze first will receive full marks and will be your Triwizard Tournament Champion!”

A loud cheer came up from the crowd, as Harry stood, the other three champions waiting in the background. He saw Ginny, Neville, and Luna in the distance, as they waved at Harry, and Harry looked forward to the maze. It was time.

"The first champion, Harry Potter is ready to get into the maze, and he will enter in five, four, three," announced Bagman as the crowd chanted along, looking all excited. "Two, one! NOW!"

Harry entered the maze, wand ready as he made his way into the maze. He had a ten minute lead and he would make the most of it. He met nothing, until he saw a fork in the maze. Quickly, he looked from one side and then to the other, before Harry decided to take the left fork. As he move down, Harry stopped as he saw several vines on the ground. They slithered towards him and he picked up a rock, before he threw it towards the vines. Just as he thought, the vines wrapped around the rock and began to crush it, reducing it to dust. Quickly, Harry stood to the side, as he put one foot forward. This caused a second vine to shoot out from the distance.

"Diffindo!" shouted Harry, as he cut through the vines and caused it to drop limply to the ground. Another vine had shot through the bushes, towards his arms. Another cutting curse had dropped that vine and Harry was able to move on without any more vines attacking him. Quickly, Harry moved towards the left, before he moved down a short path.

He paused before he was forced to throw himself to the ground as a pod magically shot from the ground. It opened and shot three darts towards where Harry would be standing. The darts fell to the ground and Harry crawled forward, before he made his way deeper into the maze. Harry took another turned and stopped when he saw a Dementor floating there. Despite the cold feeling that filled his body, he was not fooled for one second what was truthfully in front of him.

"Riddikulus!" shouted Harry, as the Dementor's cloak turned shocking pink. Harry snickered at the absurd sight that he saw, before he rushed even deeper into the maze. He took another turn and winced as he had stepped right into quicksand. Harry relaxed his muscles, it would only cause him to sink faster. He heard the announcement that Krum had entered the maze. Slowly, without agitating his descent, Harry held his wand, before he pointed towards a bush to the side, magnetizing one of the branches. Sure enough, the magically modified magnet locked onto Harry's Portkey, lifting him out of the trap.

Harry readjusted his footing, before he cancelled the charm and he dropped down on the other side. He siphoned the muck off of his robes as he made his way down the side of the mazes. He turned right, nearly into a blast from a Blast Ended Skrewt. Those things had gotten big in class, but Hagrid had to discontinue using them do to them getting too violent and killing each other. Naturally, given the rest of the tournament, it made them perfect. Harry dodged another jet of fire as it blasted off once again. It was at least twelve feet and bad tempered as well.

“REDUCTO!” shouted Harry as the spell connected with the armor but it served to make the beast angry, as it turned its tail. Harry widened, that thing would not just sting it, it could impale him with the size of that thing. “REDUCTO!”

The Skrewt gave a scream, as its tail was wounded. The spell was nowhere near strong enough to do too much damage.

“Atterol!” shouted Harry as he sent a large metal rod right into the Blast Ended Skrewt. It impaled into his armor but it was stopped for it reached the skin. Harry looked, he saw one point of weakness, the fleshy under side could easily be exploited. The Skrewt raised up to blast off at Harry, but this time he was ready to counter the attack. “WINGARDIUM LEVIOSA!”

The Skrewt gave a surprised grunt as Harry had just managed to levitate it into the air, at least over the hedge. Harry released the Skrewt, dropping it right about where the quicksand would have been. The moment Harry cancelled the spell, he moved as quick as his feet could carry him, as it appeared that he had missed Cedric entering the maze as he dealt with the Skrewt, as Fleur was being announced as entering right now, meaning that all four of the champions had entered the maze.

Harry moved down further into the maze, he took another turn where a series of magically created lights, no doubt spells in stasis, were interconnected. Quickly, Harry picked up a rock on the ground and he threw it forward. The moment the rock connected the lights, it was propelled back at least three times the speed that Harry had thrown it.

Wiping the sweat off of his forehead, Harry stepped forward. A brief moment of thinking, it became apparent that he would have to disable the spells.

“Okay, Harry, think, this is no doubt some N.E.W.T. spell, and if you don’t do it right, you will be blasted right through the hedge,” muttered Harry as he thought carefully and tried several complex wand movements to disable the defenses. The light of the spells got brighter and Harry stepped back to defend himself. “PROTEGO!”

The shield appeared on Harry had only just protected him from the full impact. The defense blasted Harry’s skill and pushed against it. Harry was backed off, but as his shield broken, the spells stopped. Harry took a breath, wondering if he should double back, but his instincts had told him this was the easiest route to the center of the maze. Thinking, something struck Harry that was so obvious on how to defuse the trap and he wondered, much like the golden egg, if they had overlooked putting in a failsafe against it.

“Finite Incantatem,” said Harry and sure enough, the magical spells faded and Harry was able to pass. He rushed down the side of the maze, as he turned down another path. Down the side, there were three paths. Closing his eyes, Harry took the one on the left and rushed down the maze, where he met a large golden Sphinx. The Sphinx turned, her eyes fixed on Harry and she smiled an extremely mysterious smile.

“Greetings champion,” stated the Sphinx, with a smile. “The path you have leading to the cup is through me, it will be the shortest distance, but to allow you passage, you must first answer my riddle. Should you answer correctly, I will stand aside and allow you passage. Fail to answer correctly, you will suffer the consequences. However, you may remain silent and take an alternate route to the center. What is your choice champion?”

“Let me hear the riddle,” stated Harry firmly, as he was so close, doubling back now would cause his momentum to be stalled.

The Sphinx nodded, before it began to recite the riddle.

First think of a person who lives in disguise.

Who deals in secrets and tells naught but lies.

Next, tell me what's always the thing to mend.

The middle of the middle, the end of the end.

And finally gives me the sound often heard.

During the search for the hard-to-find word.

Now string them together and answer me this.

Which creature would you be unwilling to kiss?

Harry stood there, marveling at the brilliance of the riddle or rather, a compilation of several other smaller riddles. It took him a few seconds to piece the riddle together but he managed to get it after mentally going over it in his head.

"The answer would be a spider," said Harry in a confident voice and the Sphinx nodded, as she stretched her legs, before Harry stepped forward. It only took a short distance before he was face to face with a very large spider. It clicked its pincers as it moved towards Harry. Viktor Krum was on the ground right now, wounded from an attack but it appeared the spider had marked Harry as its prey. It moved forward and Harry held his wand firmly. "STUPEFY!"

The stunning spell staggered the spider briefly but it continued to move right towards Harry. Harry stepped back to give himself some room to cast his next attack.

"INCARCEROUS!" shouted Harry, as ropes wrapped around the legs of the spider and tied them together. The spider crashed down to the ground, before Harry moved over the spider, before it had a chance to free itself. It appeared that Krum had recovered from his ordeal, to move on and quickly, Harry started down the path to the cup. At the end of the path, Harry spotted Krum who was close to grabbing the cup. He would never catch the champion in time.

“STUPEFY!” cried a voice and Harry looked up to see Krum on the ground and Cedric stood, wand held. Harry looked from Cedric to Krum and Harry stepped forward. Cedric was even closer to the cup than Krum was, but yet he did not grab it. Harry stepped forward, before he held his wand and he tested the cup. It lit up, enveloped in a blue light.

“Just as I thought, a Portkey,” muttered Harry as he turned but Cedric stood, wand pointed at Harry’s chest.

“Grab the cup, Potter,” said Cedric in a blank emotionless voice and Harry knew the symptoms right away, he had been put under the Imperius Curse.

“Cedric, the cup’s a Portkey, if you can hear me, you should fight the curse,” said Harry, who looked at Cedric before he sent a full body bind curse at Harry. “PROTEGO!”

A pair of curses had sent towards Harry, in an attempt to subdue him so Cedric could force his hand on the cup. Harry moved around, as he ducked around, before he positioned his body.

“AGUAMENTIA!” shouted Harry, as a jet of cold water blasted from his wand and struck Cedric right in the face. Cedric was knocked down, soaking wet and he shook his head, in an attempt to clear the cobwebs. Much to his surprise, it worked.

“What happened...how did I get here...” stated Cedric as he looked at Harry. “The last thing I remember, a short man with one finger missing appeared in my dormitory and now I’m here. I don’t have the foggiest idea what happened”

“Wormtail!” hissed Harry and Cedric looked at him, confused. Harry realized this was too good of an opportunity to miss, no matter how dangerous it was. He could kill two birds with one stone. “Listen, Cedric, I’m really sorry.”

“About what?” asked Cedric.

“About this,” said Harry as he pointed his wand towards the official Hogwarts champion. “STUPEFY!”

Cedric thumped to the ground and Harry stood, looking over his shoulder. Krum and Cedric had both been knocked out and Fleur was nowhere to be seen. Quickly, he held out his wrist, hoping that the modification he had made to the Portkeys just days ago had worked.

“Ginny, can you hear me?” asked Harry in an anxious voice.

“Barely Harry, the noise of the crowd is causing a lot of interference, we can even barely see what’s going on down there anyway,” said Ginny’s voice, that was slightly masked, but Harry could pick up on what she was saying. “What’s wrong?”

“Wormtail was here Ginny, I’m guessing he’s long gone right now, he put Cedric under the Imperius Curse, trying to make sure I reached the Cup, which has been turned into a Portkey by our rodent Animagus friend,” said Harry as he stepped towards the Portkey, before he pushed his wand into his sleeve and removed an identical, but completely fake wand that he created, that he would allow Voldemort to take. “You know what has to be done now.”

“I don’t like it, but yes I know and I know you have taken every precaution,” said Ginny in a resigned voice.

“Including a couple of other features, especially if Voldemort tries to send a Killing Curse at me, the newest little addition will kick in, it will transport me to Hogsmeade immediately,” said Harry hoping that that particular modification would work, as there had not been a chance to test it for obvious reasons. Still there was no time like the present, he supposed. “Still, if I’m not back in thirty minutes, you know what to do, Ginny.”

“Yes, Harry,” said Ginny firmly, as she understood what Harry felt he had to do, even though she did not like it at all.. “Luna and Neville are telling me to tell you to keep your eyes open and to be careful, don’t get too confident, it is Voldemort, and I agree one hundred percent with then. Come back in one piece.”

"I intend to, Ginny," said Harry, who paused as he looked at the Portkey. He would be lying if he did not have certain reservations, but by maintaining the illusion that he willingly would walk into a trap, he might catch Voldemort by surprise. It was worth a shot but even if he could not finish this off, at the very least, he could get Wormtail. He closed the line of communication. As much as he wanted to keep his friends updated on what was happening, this trick needed a lot of magic and concentration and he could not afford to sacrifice anything when dealing with Voldemort.

After he took a deep breath and prepared to fix his face in a surprised look, Harry reached forward and gripped onto the Portkey, the fake wand in his hand, the real one up his sleeve, ready to surprise Voldemort and Wormtail. With a tug, Harry felt it pull him to some unknown location.

Coming Up Next. Harry and Voldemort face to face. Was Harry's decision to go along with the flow of Voldemort's plan a well calculated move that will set Voldemort back or a disastrous misstep that will rattle Harry's long term plans? Only one way to find out, get ready for chapter twelve which will be posted when it's ready to be posted.

Chapter Twelve: Rebirth:

Harry dropped from the ground, the Portkey in his hand. He hit the ground just in time to see a blast of light coming right towards him. In an instant, Harry found himself on the sitting on the ground. He took a hell of a hit, the spell had knocked the wind out of him, but he had to make it look genuine. A robed figure had walked over and shot ropes from his wand. They wrapped around Harry and tied him to a tombstone. Twisting his head slightly, Harry could read the words, "Tom Riddle" in faded writing.

"Quickly, Wormtail," hissed a voice from the distance as the robed figure cowered over, to double check to see if Harry was properly secured before he moved over.

"All is ready, my lord," stated Wormtail.

"Then do it, we cannot afford to be off by a second," said the voice with a hiss and Wormtail hastened to obey, before he picked up an item from the ground.

"Bone of the father, unknowingly given, you will renew your son!" chanted Wormtail, as he had placed the bone into the cauldron, it had dropped with a splash.

Harry stood, as the fake wand was off in the distance and the real one was easily accessible for him to free himself. He watched Wormtail raise a dagger from his robes and he lifted it up. Harry watched with shock, he would never have thought Wormtail would have had the nerve to do this but right before his eyes, the traitor had hacked off his own hand. A blood curdling shriek echoed throughout the grave yard as Wormtail did the deed.

"Flesh of the servant willingly given you will r-revive your master," said Wormtail in a pained voice as he took what was once a working human hand and dropped it into the cauldron. He turned, moving towards Wormtail.

"Right, Pettigrew, chop off your own hand, like he'd do it for you if the positions were reversed," said Harry so only Wormtail could hear him

but he reached forward, dagger in hand, as he sliced Harry's sleeve and with his lone shaking hand, pulled out a vial, levitating it in the air.

"Blood of the enemy, forcibly taken, will resurrect your foe," said Wormtail as he stabbed Harry in the arm, before the blood dripped into the vial.

"Help yourself, Wormtail, by all means, take my blood," hissed Harry and Wormtail froze, unsure what to do, but the blood had to be added now for the ritual to go on right. The blood bubbled as Wormtail turned back towards the cauldron. The servant moved forward, before he collapsed to the ground and just managed to dump the stolen blood in the cauldron.

Green smoke rose from the cauldron, before it turned multiple colors. A couple of moments later, as Harry hoped that something would have gone wrong, a cold high voice filled the graveyard.

"Robe me, Wormtail," hissed Voldemort, as mercifully the smoke was thick enough to block Voldemort's body, as Wormtail moved over, cradling his arm, how he was able to walk was a miracle in itself. Wormtail staggered forward, as he placed the robe on his master and handed Voldemort his wand. Voldemort looked at his wand, as he turned to face Harry who was tied up to the gravestone. "Harry, we meet once again."

Harry refused to say anything, he just waited for the right moment, when Voldemort was distracted.

"You find yourself tied to the gravestone of my late father, a Muggle, common, filthy, not one ounce of magic, but without him, I would not be standing before you today, so he did in fact have one use in death," commented Voldemort, before he grabbed Wormtail's good arm and touched a black skull with his finger. Wormtail shrieked in agony, before he fell to the ground and sobbed loudly. "Now, they've all felt it, many will come crawling back, but others will attempt to ignore it. They will pay the ultimate price Harry, much like you will in a matter of moments."

Voldemort turned his attention away from Harry. Harry began to slowly ease his wand into grip, timing was in fact everything. If Voldemort was busy addressing his followers, then it would be the perfect opportunity. After a couple of moments, several pops echoed throughout the grave yard as several dozen figures in black robes appeared, their faces obscured in white skull like masks. They all fixed their glances upon Voldemort, who stood there, with a humorless expression on his face.

“Master,” said one of the Death Eaters.

“But how?” asked another.

“I have returned, in time, you will know why, but I must say it is nice that we all once again stand tall underneath the dark mark,” said Voldemort as his followers leaned in forward, almost in relief and Voldemort stood, letting them have their moment for he let them in on the reality of the situation. “Yet, something in me tells us that this reunion is not as joyous as it should have been. I smell guilt, I smell regret, I smell deception from many of you. And, above all, I sense foolishness. Did each and every one of you who had avoided Azkaban by denouncing me, really believe that I was truly gone? Did you not even pursue every avenue to ensure that I was not somewhere, follow every possible lead? Yet, for thirteen long years, I was trapped, virtually powerless, in the most weakened form. I was forced to flee and for a time, I felt vulnerable.”

Voldemort looked at his followers.

“Yet, I was still alive, despite everything, despite most of my followers leaving me to my own devices, those who did not, continued to fight the fight, but they were few and far between,” said Voldemort softly. “The one’s who made an effort found themselves in Azkaban or dead. So, while it was a failing effort, at the very least they tried to keep up the battle. Without me, the effort failed and each and every one of you standing before me went back to your mediocre lives, never again to taste the kind of power that I can offer. Granted, many of you retained prominent positions in the Ministry, but the Ministry is nothing but a piece of paper that an above average wizard could tear through easily. Had Dumbledore had the nerve and not worried about

his reputation, he could have ruled them with an iron fist, but where he failed, I, Lord Voldemort, shall succeed.”

“My Lord, forgive us, we had no idea...” stated a Death Eater, but Voldemort had no time for petty begging of forgiveness.

“Crucio,” said Voldemort lazily as the Death Eater screamed in pain. After only a few seconds of torture and he was on the ground, breathing heavily. “Avery, you fool, to your feet, let me make thing one perfectly clear, I do not forgive treacherous spineless cowards. Your inaction has set our plans back years. Yet, I am willing to give one last chance to all of you, to prove you worth but let me remind you all one last thing. Do not think you cannot be replaced. In the world, even in this very country, there are countless young, ambitious witches and wizards, that can easily replace each and every one of you. Is that clear?”

“Yes, my Lord,” chanted the Death Eaters in unison, faltering under the icy stare of Voldemort who nodded.

“Good, you all have much to do before you work yourselves up to your more stature in my ranks, debts must be repaid, but time may ease the wounds, if not heal them, but I doubt that very much,” said Voldemort coldly. “Wormtail has already repaid some of his debt, have you not Wormtail?”

“Yes...my Lord,” said Wormtail, wincing as he clutched his bloody stump of a hand.

“Wormtail’s own sacrifice partially allowed me to return to power and while he was cowardly and traitorous beyond you all, nevertheless, Lord Voldemort rewards his helpers,” said Voldemort as he waved his wand and a silvery substance shot out of it, spinning around, before it formed into a silver hand where Wormtail’s hand once was.

“It’s beautiful, my lord,” said Wormtail happily as he examined his new hand and looked absolutely ecstatic. “Thank you, it is much more than I deserve, it is wonderful.”

“That much we agree on, Wormtail,” said Voldemort as he turned to address his followers one by one. While he was doing this, Harry had begun to free himself. He would have to cut the ropes silently, which would take some time, but at the rate Voldemort was rambling, he had plenty of time. In fact, to an extent, Harry was worried that Voldemort would run into the thirty minute window that him and Ginny had agreed on. While it would be amusing to see the look on Voldemort’s face when Harry disappeared right in front of his nose, Harry did want to deliver a few good curses to Voldemort and perhaps get Wormtail as well.

Voldemort continued to talk, to each individual Death Eater for a brief period of time, as Harry had the ropes loosened enough for him to free himself. At that moment, Voldemort turned to face Harry.

“But all of you pale in comparison when we have the guest of honor, Harry Potter,” concluded Voldemort as he faced Harry. “Right now I’m going to demonstrate how foolish you were for thinking that this mere child could have defeated me. Wormtail, untie him and give him his wand.”

“No need, Riddle, I’ve managed that myself,” said Harry as the ropes snapped and he got to his feet, wand at the ready, as he waited for Voldemort to make a move. The Death Eaters stood, numb in shock, as Potter had freed himself and Voldemort stepped back. It took a lot to surprise the Dark Lord but this in fact managed it.

“Wormtail, why did you not check him for an extra wand?” demanded Voldemort and Wormtail cowered at his master’s wrath.

“I was unaware,” said Wormtail as he backed off and cowered under Voldemort’s wrath.

“That much is obvious,” said Voldemort coldly as he turned to Harry. “Harry, it is now time for you to meet your end.”

“Why not, I mean, you almost killed me once today,” asked Harry and Voldemort was caught off guard. “I mean, that long, endless speech you gave, it nearly bored me to death. You droned on and on and on,

about how you're so powerful and everyone else is scum at the bottom of your feet, it got old. Get some new material, Voldemort."

"Do not attempt psychological warfare with me, Potter," said Voldemort softly, his slit like eyes fixed on Harry, calmly, without the slightest hint of emotion. "It is a game that you won't win."

"We'll see Riddle, we'll see," said Harry as he watched an expression of anger cloud over Voldemort's face. As many books on dueling had stated, dueling was seventy percent psychological and thirty percent magic. He needed to get into Voldemort's head, it would cause him to make mistakes and perhaps set him up for a fall.

"Very well then, do you know how to duel, Harry Potter?" asked Voldemort.

"Yes, I might have picked up a few things, but I doubt you know how to duel, considering you got obliterated by a one year old," said Harry and Voldemort paused, eye twitching, as he stared down Harry. "Well, I'm sure it was a fluke, but just to be on the safe side, I wouldn't advise ever taking candy from a baby, you might get embarrassed again."

"Just bow, Potter," said Voldemort in a forced voice and Harry gave a mocking bow, before he stuck his nose in the air towards Voldemort. Voldemort bowed shortly, before he lifted his wand. "Crucio!"

Harry avoided the curse by simply not being in the in the way before he flicked his wand towards Voldemort.

"SCOURGIFY!" shouted Harry. Voldemort laughed at the fact that Potter used a scouring charm at him, but the fact that it was aimed at his eyes caused Voldemort the slightest bit of discomfort. It was not meant to harm, but rather to discomfort. As Voldemort recovered, Harry was ready for the next attack "WINGARADIUM LEVIOSA!"

Harry pointed his wand at a tombstone and he hoisted it from the ground, right above Voldemort. Before he let it drop, right above Voldemort's head. Voldemort blasted the tombstone to bits and sent

rocks, along with dust, in every direction. When the dust cleared, Harry was not in his line of sight.

“Come out and face me like a man, Potter,” said Voldemort coldly.

“No, that would be stupid,” said Harry from behind a tree. Voldemort blasted the tree out of the way and a conjured yellow cloud of acid splashed towards Voldemort. Voldemort jabbed his wand the acid solidified, before it dropped to the ground. “Effrego!”

Voldemort blocked the bone breaking curse and a coma curse was deflected from the ground. Harry dodged a jet of black light once Voldemort had seen him.

“Attero!” cried Harry and a steel spike shot from his wand and Voldemort shrieked in agony, as it impaled right through his leg Voldemort dropped to the ground, as blood dripped to the ground, but Harry felt a tug for his Portkey, yet he still remained in the graveyard.

“Harry, there’s a problem, something’s causing your Portkey not to work,” whispered Ginny anxiously, after opening the connection from her ened. “I snuck into Hogsmeade, using the Cloak, I’m outside of the wards around Hogwarts, so I should be able to retrieve you as the anti-Portkey wards aren’t a problem. I don’t know, but...”

“Keep trying Ginny,” said Harry under his breath, but the million galleon question was how in the hell had Wormtail gotten around the Anti-Portkey wards. Unless they were a well constructed bluff to discourage just anyone from using a Portkey to sneak in in or perhaps they were taken down. After all, for all Harry knew, the Portkey could have directed the winner somewhere other than a graveyard battle with Voldemort. Many possible explanations moved around Harry’s head, but right now, he needed to focus on Voldemort and finding a way out of there, especially if Ginny failed to get the Portkey to work. “If I can, I’ll get back to the Triwizard Cup, but that...might be a bit of a problem.”

As he saw the Death Eaters, standing there, at least six of them blocking the easiest way to the cup, he hoped Ginny could get his

Portkey to work and he saw Voldemort remove the spike from his leg, with a slight limp as he turned to Harry, anger in his eyes and with a flick of his wrist, the Dark Lord knocked his young opponent off of his feet. Thankfully, he managed to adjust his body to land where it did the least amount of damage, but the drop still was not pleasant at all.

Voldemort leaned forward, he felt more fatigued than he had ever in his life. Several of his Death Eaters stepped forward, to gain favor with their master by assisting him.

"Return to your place, I am fine," said Voldemort coldly, as his Death Eaters backed off, as he watched his enemy get to his feet, shaking off the super powered banishing spell. Voldemort held his wand ready, as he faced Harry with menace in his eyes. "Crucio."

Harry bit his tongue, but throughout his body, there was pain beyond all belief. It felt like white hot knives wrapped in razor wire were stabbing through every inch of his body, as Voldemort looked at Harry with twisted triumph. Harry attempted to adjust his concentration enough through the pain. He felt another attempt for Ginny to retrieve him and for a brief second, he thought it would work. Unfortunately, he dropped down to the ground, the after effects of the curse racking his body with pain.

"Potter, this is what you get for daring to stand up to me," said Voldemort softly. "You don't want any more of that Potter. Admit it, admit that you were mistaken in thinking you can ever stand up to Lord Voldemort. Admit it and I will grant you a painless, quick death."

Harry's body ached all over, but at least he still had his wits about himself. Voldemort stood over him and waited for Harry to respond, but he was not going to give Voldemort the satisfaction of respond. In fact, Harry looked over, seeing the cup and spotting Wormtail. If he timed this right and maneuvered a few Death Eaters against each other to cause a diversion, he could just manage to get out. It would have to be done exactly right.

"Perhaps another dose of pain to refresh your mind on your foolishness," said Voldemort coldly as he looked at Harry, but once again he refused to answer. "Crucio!"

Once again the pain had filled every inch of Harry's body. The curse was held on him for thirty seconds, but it felt like much longer. Voldemort stared at Harry, coldly, as he dropped to the ground, ready to make his move.

"Admit it Harry, you were mistaken to think you could match up to Lord Voldemort, you are nothing but a foolish child," taunted Voldemort as Harry tried to regain his bearings as his adversary lifted his wand and pointed it forward. "Admit it, Harry. Admit that I'm your superior. Imperio!"

Harry felt the light hearted feeling wash over him. He had broken this before, but Voldemort's will was much stronger than Crouch Junior's demonstration in class. Voldemort turned to Harry, a triumphant expression on his face.

"Admit it Harry, admit that I am your superior," ordered Voldemort as Harry felt a light voice in his head, but instinctively, the same techniques that he employed when learning Occlumency had kicked in. It had nearly blocked out the voice in his head.

"No, Riddle," responded Harry in a defiant voice and Voldemort did not even bat an eye, but rather attempted to force his will upon Harry more.

"Admit it Harry, that you were a fool, a meddlesome child that got in my way and should be punished," ordered Voldemort, a bit more forcefully and Harry very nearly complied, but he managed to summon enough to fight off the curse.

"Bite me, Riddle," said Harry, and once again Voldemort screwed his eyes up and put even more concentration. Harry never had felt anything more strong in his life, it was obvious that Voldemort wished for Harry to admit it.

"Harry, there's no need to be rude, all you need to do is to admit that I'm your superior, that the fact you beat me before was down to pure luck, just admit it Harry, just admit you are just a mere child who got lucky, but your luck as run out," said Voldemort in a commanding

voice. "Admit it Harry, say it, I am not worthy, Lord Voldemort is the greatest wizard that ever lived."

"NEVER!" shouted Harry forcefully as he threw off the curse and the backlash had connected with Voldemort. Voldemort dropped to the ground to his knees, a ringing filling his ears, as the sound of the backlash made it feel like Voldemort's skull was splitting. Voldemort struggled through the agony, as it slowly, but painfully faded, as Harry stood to his feet. He was slightly weakened by the after effects of the unforgiveable curses but he quickly rushed over, eyes on the Triwizard Cup.

"Stop him!" shouted Voldemort angrily, as blood dripped from his ears as he just managed to regain his bearings after Harry had thrown off the Imperius Curse. Harry swerved to the left, avoiding a Killing Curse. An unfortunate Death Eater had gotten in the way and dropped to the ground. There was chaos among Voldemort's forces, it was obvious they were out of practice, as they had not worked together in twelve years.

Harry moved towards Wormtail. Wormtail shakily raised his wand, but he looked like a deer in the headlights.

"EXPELLIARMUS!" shouted Harry as Wormtail's wand lifted from his hand. He had blocked an attack from behind as Wormtail rushed for his wand. Harry dodged a jet of black light. "STUPEFY!"

Wormtail dropped to the ground, stunned.

"Protego," stated Harry, as a sickening yellow light soured through him. The spell bounced off of the shield, fading into mid air. Quickly, Harry grabbed Wormtail and bolted right towards the Triwizard Cup, as he maintained the shield charm while he dodged the spells. It was a strain to keep the shield over himself and Wormtail; he needed to get the rat out of here alive, he was important to clearing Sirius's name. Harry's concentration dropped for a brief second, but not too long. "Protego!"

The shield was renewed and Harry was inches away from retrieving the Triwizard Cup Portkey. He felt a small tug but it was apparent that

whatever malfunction had happened to his Portkey was still recurring. It just had to be one of those unforeseen malfunctions that happened at the worst possible and most inconvenient time. Once he escaped, Harry vowed to figure out what went wrong. The time for that would be later, as right now, he was nearly in the grasp of the Triwizard Tournament Cup.

Black and green flames erupted from the ground right in front of the cup. The heat was intense and it blocked Harry's path to his ticket out of the graveyard. He stepped back to shield himself from the intense heat, his body was still sore from the brief exposure to the Cruciatus curse. Voldemort stalked him, a humorless expression etched on his face.

"Did you really think I would just allow you to leave, Potter?" asked Voldemort coldly and Harry looked at Voldemort, as an insane plan began to form in his head. Perhaps the retrieval function on the Portkey was malfunctioning but there was another avenue that Harry felt was overlooked. As much as he hated to roll the dice with fate, the fact remained that it was perhaps the only way to get out. He let Wormtail drop, ready to pick him up the second it kicked it, if it had kicked in. It was do or die.

"Well, the Imperius Curse failed, the Cruciatus Curse failed, perhaps you should go for the Killing Curse, Riddle," suggested Harry as Voldemort stood, silent, as he wondered what Potter was trying to accomplish. "Or perhaps you do remember what happened last time, I don't think it would work on me, I don't think you're powerful enough to beat me with a Killing Curse. I dare you to prove me wrong, Voldemort. Come on, two words, it's all it takes, it will be easy, unless you're afraid it might give you a second out of body experience."

Voldemort stood there, as he eyed Potter. He had fought a lot of impudent wizards in his day and knew when someone was goading him into doing something that was not in his best interests. He had heard Potter's taunts, through his returning hearing, but refused to rise to the bait that Potter was giving him.

"Nice try, Potter, but did you really think I was foolish enough to fall for that?" demanded Voldemort softly, as he stared at Harry with pure

hatred. Harry refused to blink, refused to back down. "There are many other, painful methods that I can employ to finish you off, only a fool would use a Killing Curse after what happened the previous time I attempted it."

"Bravo, Voldemort, perhaps you're not as stupid as I thought," said Harry with a smirk, even though he was worried, the flames had continued to encircle the Triwizard Cup. The tug that he felt on the Portkey was a bit stronger, but something was still blocking Ginny's ability to retrieve him.

"Mind your tongue, Potter," said Voldemort before he raised his wand to point but Harry was ready.

"INCENDIO!" shouted Harry loudly, while the flames he produced was nowhere as nearly as powerful as the dark magic that Voldemort use, they required Voldemort to defend himself. The black flames still flickered around the cup, as Voldemort dodged the attacks. "Letargus!"

The coma curse soured right at Voldemort at the speed of light but he avoided the assault. The Death Eaters stepped back, none of them wished to be in the crossfire of the attack. Two silent, but deadly looking spells came towards Harry.

"Wingardium Leviosa," said Harry and another tombstone levitated in front of them. The spells connected with the tombstone and blew it to bits. Voldemort slashed his wand towards Harry seconds after the dust cleared, a murderous look in his eyes but Harry was on his toes, ready to defend himself the moment his enemy sent an attack. "Protego."

The shield spell blocked most of the curse. The bit that did connected only served to knock the wind out of Harry. Bouncing back, Harry maintained the shield, as a blunt magical attack blasted the shield. Harry maintained his balance from the sheer force of will.

Voldemort continued to attack his opponent, who dodged around each and every assault, while using a shield charm. An average wizard could not have used a shield to block most of the advanced

dark magic that Voldemort had employed. Most would have been ripped into pieces on the first attack, but yet this mere child kept up with him. The desire to eliminate this threat to his power had risen, but also Voldemort felt many signs of fatigue setting on. He had never tired before and in fact, this ritual would return him to a body that would have a higher level of endurance than ever before. Yet, something appeared to be draining his energy. He briefly wondered if Wormtail had botched the ritual somehow. Still, he would worry about that once Potter was dead, he had to keep at it, the boy would not be able to hold him off for long.

Harry was pleasantly surprised how well he was able to keep the fight against Voldemort. When he thought he could not block a spell much longer, he managed to keep it up. Yet, with these sudden, inexplicable bursts of adrenaline that gave Harry more energy than he ever had before, they were followed by pain that seemingly shot through every part of his body. He needed to find a way out, but escape appeared to be something that was going to take some careful planning to escape. Harry stooped forward, slightly, unable to hold up the shield for much longer. The latest burst of energy had worn off and his body felt the effects of countering such advanced magic. Voldemort stood, as he aimed his wand and sent a crimson red light illuminated in orange.

“Repello!” shouted Harry, hoping that he could find one final burst of energy that would repel this deadly attack back at Voldemort. Both spells connected with each other in mid air, as Harry could feel his wand vibrating in his hand. The energy was such if he could somehow force it at Voldemort, he could stop him for good. Several ghostly figures swirled from the intertwined spells, but something blocked their ability to escape and Harry jabbed his wand forward as the interconnected lights vibrated.

A loud explosion filled through the graveyard. The impact blew several Death Eaters back and Harry felt dizzy. He was able to look up in time to see Voldemort’s head snap back as a loud crack echoed throughout the entire graveyard. Harry dropped to the ground, winded, but that was nowhere near the condition Voldemort was in. He was motionless on the ground, the eyes rolled in the back of his head, his head snapped crudely to the left. Harry looked up and the Death

Eaters wore similar utterly shocked looks. While they were distracted by their shock, Harry snuck a look at the cup, which was no longer protected by the black flames. It was time to make his move. He grabbed the stunned Wormtail roughly by the sleeve and then he picked up Voldemort's wand, along with his own, before he bolted to the Triwizard Cup.

"Stun him!" shouted Lucius Malfoy, as he found his voice, if the Dark Lord had survived once again, he did not want to be the one responsible for Potter's escape. Several attacks flew right towards Harry, who picked his spots wisely. He blocked some while he repelled back many others.

Harry dove right towards the cup, with Wormtail still in hand, along with both his and Voldemort's wands, as he managed to deflect a stunning spell.

"Ginny, I have the cup," muttered Harry into his Portkey, just barely able to muster enough energy employ the communication function and keep it open long enough to hear Ginny's response.

"Right, Harry, I'm returning from Hogsmeade right now, I'll see you in a minute," said Ginny's faint, but shaky and worried voice, as Harry grasped onto the cup, as he held Wormtail tightly as they were transported to Hogwarts grounds.

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Harry's head throbbed in pain as he dropped to the ground. Wormtail dropped right next to him and the Triwizard Cup dropped to the ground, right to his side. Harry collapsed to the ground. He wanted nothing better to crawl into bed for a few hours or the next week or two. Quickly, he shoved Voldemort's wand into a pocket, as he saw Dumbledore rush over, with Fudge following, a bemused look on his face.

"Harry, what happened?" questioned Dumbledore as he looked at Harry.

“Wormtail...Triwizard Cup into a Portkey...return,” rasped Harry, as he fixed his face in a traumatized expression, but truthfully he was in much better shape than he expected. He had Wormtail and he took Voldemort’s wand, which would tell him a lot about what the Dark Lord had to do to rise to power.

“Is he back Harry?” asked Dumbledore in a fearful voice. “Lord Voldemort, has he returned?”

Before Harry could even formulate a response, Fudge moved over and he stood in shock, when he saw the figure on the ground.

“Merlin’s beard, Peter Pettigrew!” shouted Fudge in horror as he saw the wizard on the ground, as panic went through his head. Perhaps, Harry and the other two had told the truth that Pettigrew was still alive and that Black was innocent. Absurd, but with Crouch Junior being alive, Fudge was not sure what to believe. At that point, Ludo Bagman walked over and Fudge quickly found his voice. “Ludo, contact the Aurors at once, I want to get this sorted out.”

“O-of course Minister,” said Bagman immediately, taken aback by Fudge’s assertive expression and at that moment, three figures rushed through the crowd, as they moved towards Harry, as Bagman rushed off in the other direction, with a slight spring in his step as it appeared that Harry had won the Triwizard Tournament and he could clear his debts with the goblins.

“Harry!” shouted Ginny, as she rushed over to him and helped him up to his feet, with Neville and Luna standing in the background, with concerned looks on their face. Ginny gave Harry a light hug and Harry returned it, as Dumbledore looked on with an approving expression before he turned to Fudge. “I’m glad that you’ve managed to find a way out.”

“Me too,” said Harry as Ginny held him, almost as if she was afraid he would collapse.

“You look terrible Harry, do you need the hospital wing?” asked Luna.

“Yes, that might be good Luna,” said Harry through the pain, before he mouthed as Dumbledore and Fudge talked to each other, with the Minister not letting one eye off of Pettigrew, as several Aurors stepped into the Hogwarts gates, so with a distraction in place to divert their attention away from him, Harry mouthed. “I’ll tell you everything later.”

“Let’s have the adults settle this, while we get you up there,” suggested Neville and Harry nodded, as he leaned against Ginny, the full brunt of being under the Cruciatus Curse had finally punished his body. Ginny held his hand comfortingly, as she escorted Harry to the hospital wing, as Luna and Neville followed closely behind.

“Pettigrew, he must have faked his death,” muttered Fudge to himself, as he wondered how foolish he could have been to not see what had happened. Pettigrew had framed Black, it was the perfect bluff and the entire world, including the Minister, had fallen for it. Yet, Snape had told him that Harry and the other two were placed under the Confundus Charm but perhaps, Fudge wondered, if he had been the victim of the same charm. Perhaps Snape put him under the spell, under Dumbledore’s orders of course, and Fudge had been blinded from the truth. Now it was obvious, Dumbledore had always done everything in his power to keep Harry at those Muggle relatives of his and if Fudge had valiantly uncovered the truth, Black would have been cleared. If Black was cleared, that Potter would have lived with his godfather but that would not have boded well for Dumbledore’s plans whatever they were. Fudge saw everything clearly now. “This entire Pettigrew mess, I have to get back to the Ministry to sort it out.”

“Cornelius, you are too focused on Pettigrew to see the bigger picture...” started Dumbledore.

“Enough, Dumbledore, if my suspicions are proven, Sirius Black will be cleared by this time tomorrow, now I must return to the Ministry, to see that Pettigrew is secured until his trial,” said Fudge stubbornly, he was not about to be tricked by Dumbledore again. Fudge would not be denied his glorious crusade in uncovering the truth and correcting injustice. Black would be cleared, Harry Potter would be in a proper magical home where he belonged, and Dumbledore would be exposed to the world as what he truly was. This was the greatest day

of his life. Dumbledore stood, as Fudge oversaw the Aurors escort a restrained Pettigrew to the Ministry.

Dumbledore watched Fudge leave, as he worried about the ramifications of what would happen once Sirius was cleared.

“Headmaster, it is as we had thought,” said Snape in a low voice as he looked at his dark mark, that for a couple of moments had vanished and now it was just beginning to reappear. He had not brought it up to Dumbledore, because Dumbledore would call it “very interesting” before not offering an explanation as to what he thought had happened. “The Dark Lord has returned.”

Dumbledore responded with a stiff nod, as Snape awaited for his response.

“We must prepare to get the old crowd together and try to maneuver Harry towards his destiny,” said Dumbledore quietly.

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The Death Eaters stood in the graveyard. Not only had they failed to stop Potter, but the boy had left with the Dark Lord’s wand. Taking another wizard’s wand was the greatest insult imaginable. Their master laid and a couple of Death Eaters took a step forward, but all of the sudden the fingers of their master had twitched. More signs of life and Voldemort was on his feet. He stood, rigid, as the Death Eaters waited for their master’s word. Time stood still as Voldemort remained silent and his followers held their breath.

“Leave me,” said Voldemort coldly, as the Death Eaters quickly disappeared. The Dark Lord stood around, had it not been for his Horcruxes, he would have perished from that backlash of magic. He looked around for several minutes for his wand and then he stopped when he found that it was missing.

Potter would pay.

Chapter Thirteen: Horcrux.

Harry was in the Hospital Wing, as he collapsed down on the bed. The sudden burst of energy that he had when he had battled Voldemort, had faded and it was replaced by sudden, but quick burst of pain. His scar slightly flared up at the oddest times as well before it stopped suddenly without the slightest hint of pain. Madam Pomfrey had walked off to get a pain relief potion and Neville and Luna stepped forward, as Ginny sat on the chair, right next to Harry.

"Too much of a chance to be heard," muttered Harry as they all nodded before he pulled Voldemort's out of his robes. "Short version is that he's back and I have his wand."

Neville, Luna, and Ginny all seemed shocked, but they all knew this was coming. Voldemort had made his return but while Harry looked to be a bit battered, he got a moral victory as he had stolen Voldemort's wand. Harry sank down on the pillows, before he handed the wand to Luna, who nodded in understanding. She would be the last person that Dumbledore would have thought to look for anything out of the ordinary with and if he had any hint that Harry had Voldemort's wand that would ruin Harry's plans.

"Here, take this and you should be back on your feet within the next couple of hours," said Madam Pomfrey, as she handed Harry a vial of a sickening looking potion. Harry took it and tipped it into his mouth. It took him a few seconds to manage to choke it down, but at least the pain had faded, as least the majority of it anyway.

"So what's the plan Harry?" muttered Ginny in his ear, as she held his hand.

"We send a letter to Sirius, to inform him that he should turn himself in, because by now, Fudge would have figured out the truth and informed the Ministry, then we head to the Room of Requirement," said Harry under his breath. "I want to see what I can find out about him with his wand, before I dispose of it."

Dumbledore walked into the Hospital Wing, as Ginny, Luna, and Neville all looked up, they knew this was coming.

"Harry, if I may I must take a few moments of your time to ask you to tell me what exactly you remember from tonight," said Dumbledore kindly with a twinkle in his eye.

"I'm not sure Headmaster, everything's all foggy," said Harry, as he tried to stall for as much time as he could, to formulate a fake memory in his mind, using his newly found Occlumency abilities. "I don't know if I can remember..."

"Just take your time Harry and tell me everything you remember," encouraged Dumbledore.

"Well I reached the Triwizard Cup, in the center of the Maze, and I touched it," said Harry with a deep breath as Dumbledore nodded, before he encouraged for him to continue. "The Cup was a Portkey I think and I found my way into a Graveyard where a cloaked figure attacked me. It was Pettigrew and...he took some of my blood, for a ritual I guess for something. Everything after that was a total blank, but I know I found my way back to the Cup after a while and Pettigrew attempted to attack me, but I stunned him I guess and then he must have grabbed onto the Cup as well, then we're back in Hogwarts."

Dumbledore stood forward as he looked through Harry's eyes. He saw a figure, Lord Voldemort rising from a cauldron, before he addressed his Death Eaters and then had Wormtail untie Harry from a Tombstone. Voldemort used a duel in an attempt to humiliate Harry, putting him under the Cruciatus Curse, before he placed the Boy-Who-Lived under the Imperius Curse, with Harry just barely breaking it. Voldemort had sent a Killing Curse while Harry had sent a Disarming Curse. Dumbledore barely suppressed a smile at Harry using such a basically harmless attack on Voldemort, it proved that he was still on the path that Dumbledore had set him on and then it was difficult to see what happened, but since they had twin wand cores, the Headmaster could guess what had happened. He did manage to make out several of the Death Eater trying to stop Harry, with Pettigrew being stunned in his efforts, with Harry instinctively grabbing him and then using the Portkey to return to Hogwarts.

"I believe I can guess what happened from there, Harry," responded Dumbledore with a nod as he looked away, much to the relief of Harry, he had a slight headache trying to maintain the charade of putting up a false memory against an accomplished Legilimens "I must take my leave right now, get some rest Harry, given what will be hard to come by in the foreseeable future."

"Absolutely Professor Dumbledore," said Harry weakly, as Dumbledore walked off without another word. It was perfect, Dumbledore had played right into Harry's plans perfectly. Harry had shown Dumbledore what he wanted to see and there was no doubt in Harry's mind that Dumbledore would refuse to believe that he had been tricked. He knew Voldemort would refuse to admit that he had been knocked around by a fourteen wizard and his Death Eaters would be too petrified of their master to contradict his word. The next logical step in his mind was beginning to formulate in his mind, to keep the Minister and Dumbledore occupied with each other while he prepared to do what was necessary.

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In a darkened, dismal room, Voldemort sat. The Dark Lord felt the after effects of having his neck magically snapped by Potter and wondered what could have gone wrong. It had to be Wormtail's fault, he botched the ritual somehow. Wormtail had gotten himself captured, it would be worthless to try and break him free from Ministry custody. Knowing the Minister's recent habit of silencing anyone who mentioned that he still existed, the Dark Lord was confident that Wormtail not have his soul for much longer. Other than his Animagus form, he was useless anyway.

Voldemort did not worry about the Ministry but rather he knew that Potter would have informed Dumbledore of his return and Dumbledore would reform the Order of the Phoenix. While few of them had ever had the nerve to do what was necessary, they were still an unnecessary annoyance that ruined a great deal of Voldemort's plans, mostly due to sheer luck and the incompetence of a few of his followers.

“Enter,” said Voldemort coldly at a knock on the door had brought him out of his thoughts and the door pushed open, before Severus Snape walked inside and knelt down before Voldemort. Voldemort paused, as he looked at Snape for a moment. “To your feet, Severus, I find it interesting that you have decided to show your face in my presence after what you have done.”

“My Lord, I would have joined you once I felt the mark burn, but it would have raised many questions,” said Snape. “I have information that you may find to be for your benefit.”

“I’ll be the judge of that,” said Voldemort coldly. “Proceed Severus, perhaps I may let you live yet.”

“Well for instance, Karkaroff ran off like the coward he was tonight, but I know where he rushed off to,” said Snape, as he handed Voldemort a slip of parchment. “Here is the address my Lord.”

Voldemort took the parchment, and looked at it as Snape stood in the shadows. While there was no expression on his face, there could be a hint of anxiousness detected in his eyes.

“It is a start Severus, but you will give me further information, especially regarding Dumbledore,” said Voldemort before he slumped forward and clutched his arm. Snape looked surprised, as Voldemort winced in agony, as intense pain throbbed through his arm. The Dark Lord had breathed heavily, as he shook madly.

“My Lord, is there something the matter?” asked Snape in confusion.

“No, just that idiot Wormtail botched the ritual that return me to full power,” hissed Voldemort as he looked up at Snape and he did not wish to bring up the fact that Potter had stolen his wand, because that was a sign of weakness to lose one’s wand. “Severus, breathe a word of this to anyone and you will die, but the pain, it’s too much, I need your abilities to find out what went wrong.”

“I require a sample of your blood, my Lord,” said Snape calmly and Voldemort nodded, before he motioned for Snape to do so. Snape conjured a dagger and a glass vial. Voldemort held his arm out, to

allow Snape to swipe it with the dagger. Several drops of blood splashed into the vial, as Voldemort's arm healed itself. Snape looked at the blood, it was still red, but it looked a bit thicker than before and it had bubbled in the vial. Quickly, Snape corked the vial. "I will return once I have tested the blood, I should be able to complete everything within the next twenty four hours."

"Then do it, Snape," said Voldemort as he felt another burst of pain through his body. If his Horcruxes would not have been in place, the botched ritual would have succeeded in causing him to meet his end.

"Of course, my Lord," said Snape swiftly with a bow.

"Then take your leave, we will discuss what information you can give me regarding Dumbledore at our next meeting," said Voldemort as he waved his hand towards the door and Snape turned, before he walked off, as he left Voldemort along.

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In the Room of Requirement in the very early morning hours after that night, Harry, Ginny, Luna, and Neville sat around, as Harry had just finished filling them in on what had happened. All three looked on with wide eyes, as a table appeared in the Room of Requirement, with a cauldron in front of them.

"I wonder if there are going to be any ramifications of you willingly giving Voldemort your blood," said Luna quietly and Harry just sat there, he did wonder about that as well, with those random sudden bursts of adrenaline that he had but he pushed it from his mind. He had more pressing matters to worry about, at least for the moment, later he would.

"A bridge we may have to cross in time, but not right now, could I have the wand, please Luna?" asked Harry and Luna nodded, before Harry took the wand, before he jabbed his wand at it. Voldemort's wand began to vibrate. "If I time this right, I'll destroy the wand, but keep the core in tact."

"I see," said Ginny, as she slid back in her chair, to give Harry some room. "The rest of the wand is useless in performing magic, the core of the wand on the other hand will give you an idea on what Voldemort did to survive being blasted by a Killing Curse on the rebound."

"And perhaps how to undo it in time," muttered Harry as the wood continued to slowly crack. There were much simpler ways to break open the wand, but at the cost of damaging the core. The wood was reduced to sawdust and all that was left of Voldemort's wand was a blackened phoenix feather.

"He reduced the feather of a pure creature, to that?" asked Luna in horror.

"I've never even heard of anything like that ever happening to a wand core," said Neville. "I suppose it's possible..."

"The proof is before you, I don't know if it's ever happened before, but in one of the books, remember, it says that an overuse of dark magic can change a core of a magical wand," said Ginny and they all nodded, it was just coming back to it. "It was just theory, but now, as he looked at the feather, we can see what happened."

"Voldemort's wand core was corrupted as he is," said Harry, as he looked at the blackened feather, it had a certain aura around it, it was hard to explain. "He's only a symptom of an overall problem, but if we break open the wands of a hundred wizards, I doubt we would find anything as polluted as this core was."

Harry reached forward and he had to withdraw his hand quickly.

"It burned my fingers, I can't even touch it," said Harry.

"Will that be a problem?" asked Neville.

"No, not in the slightest, I would think, Harry would just use a levitation charm to move the feather," said Ginny.

“Ginny’s right, but we have to get the potion ready, so we can see what secrets this one, twisted feather holds,” said Harry as he sighed, while Prior Incantatem would be much easier, it only replayed up to the last twenty spells in the wand in reverse order. That revealed a very distinctive flaw, as it would be easy to clear any evidence by casting a bunch of useless spells in rapid succession. Only a really stupid wizard or a really arrogant one would be caught by evidence with the reverse spell effect. The potion that Harry brewed would tell him every spell that Voldemort had ever used with that wand, as he took out the Potion’s kit from his bag. “It should take up to three hours to brew the potion. It’s the first time I’ve brewed it, so I hope it works.”

“Don’t worry Harry, it will,” encouraged Ginny as Harry began to get to work. He wanted to get this done today.

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“So, Voldemort suffered a sudden burst of pain when you were talking to him, Severus,” said Dumbledore as he looked at Snape as the Potions Master sat across from him.

“Yes, Headmaster, the ritual that he returned to power was botched in some way,” said Snape. “I have run numerous tests of the blood, it is rather peculiar indeed. The blood is like poison, it is a wonder that the Dark Lord did not drop dead the second the ritual completed.”

“Not as odd as you would have thought, Severus,” said Dumbledore cryptically, as he had long since suspected the measures that Lord Voldemort had taken to cling onto life like a parasite. “Dark magic is chaotic in nature, one miscalculation, especially with someone with below average ability such as Peter Pettigrew, and all is not as it was intended.”

“I believe that Pettigrew did not make the mistake, as I know of the ritual in mind and I believe that Potter might have done something to the blood that caused this,” said Snape.

“I believe you are mistaken about this, Severus,” said Dumbledore calmly. “I have taken a peak inside Harry’s memories of the encounter at the graveyard and I believe that he did nothing to mess

up the ritual that returned to Voldemort to power. It was a miscue on Pettigrew's part."

Snape opened his mouth to ask Dumbledore if he had considered that Potter might have tricked him but he stopped suddenly. Did he really want to give Potter all that much credit? After all, that would require Snape to admit that Potter was much better than he was and it was bad enough he was forced to give him good marks in class as of late.

"Of course, the real question is, can this mistake be cured?" asked Dumbledore.

"Naturally, but if we time this right, we can alter the potion slightly, where it would slowly speed up the process while making the Dark Lord believe that the potion worked," said Severus and Dumbledore shook his head. "Headmaster, with all due respect, this is the perfect chance to eliminate the Dark Lord for good, we must not squander it."

"No Severus, you will make the potion correctly," said Dumbledore in a stern voice. "There are elements of Voldemort's past that you fully do not understand and he will catch on after a time that you have incorrectly made the potion. He must remain alive for right now, until the time is right."

"If you wish for me to do so, Headmaster," said Snape in a slightly skeptical voice. "Might I ask why you wish for the Dark Lord to remain alive?"

"I have my reasons, Severus, trust me, everything will all work out in the end," said Dumbledore, as Harry's defeat of Voldemort was necessary to ensure that someone was around to continue Dumbledore's legacy once he was gone. Thirteen years of hard work could not be destroyed by one mistake in a ritual. "Make the potion and give it to Voldemort, along with the information that I told you to leak to him."

"Of course," said Snape who knew this was a mistake, but had no choice to obey Dumbledore. "I'll keep you informed if I learn anything else, Headmaster."

"I know you will, Severus," said Dumbledore as Snape walked off. Dumbledore sat down, he had a much bigger problem on his hand. Sirius Black would have found out that Pettigrew had been found and would claim guardianship of Harry. Harry must be returned to the Dursleys for the first month of summer, it was for his own good. He hoped that he could find a way to convince Sirius that it was for the greater good.

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The potion in the Room of Requirement was completed and Harry levitated the feather in the air. Four pairs of goggles appeared on the table.

"Put these on, it's not pleasant to get this potion in his eyes," said Harry and Luna, Neville, and Ginny did as they were told, as Harry dropped the feather into the potion. A green smoke rose from the potion, as Harry was pleased, it meant that everything was working. The smoke turned white immediately, as the next step of the potion began to occur. A slow, but steady flash of images began to appear in the smoke. Harry saw several faces appear, outlined in green light.

"Victims of Voldemort?" whispered Luna after the fourth one flashed by and Harry nodded as he watched the images through the mist continued. His eyes widened as they continued to flash through. He paused, a very peculiar image appeared multiple times at various points. A large black object appeared and was ripped in half, slowly with the small echo of an ear splitting shriek as it was. The shape of this object was very difficult to determine, but which each instance, it was smaller and smaller, until the last time, where it had been just barely visible, weakened. Several moments after that, the mist faded, with the Phoenix feather having completely dissolved. Still, the memories of what he saw were in Harry's head and he could view them in the pensieve at any moment, in greater detail.

"Very few of those I could even figure out what they were," said Harry and the others nodded, they were had a loss at what most of the images they saw meant, but some of them were graphic. It was disturbing the lengths Voldemort had went through to gain even more

power, even though by all accounts he was a rather powerful wizard to begin with. It just seemed like he could never get enough power, it was a constant addiction that he would never completely fulfill. There had to be warning signs, Riddle himself said as much that Dumbledore did not trust him, but yet nothing was done. "There was one image that stood out to me above everything else..."

"Those things getting ripped in half," concluded Ginny.

"That stood out to me as well," said Neville as he was barely able to hide his shudders.

"Disturbing, yet powerful, advanced dark magic," said Luna thoughtfully. "But what exactly did he do?"

"I don't even know it could be classified as dark magic, I think we might be dealing with something even more dangerous, if my guess is right, then unlocking the secrets to those particular spells will be our key to defeating Voldemort," said Harry with a frown, as he felt his forehead heat up. He hoped he was not getting a fever. "Whatever Voldemort did, I doubt very much we are going to find it at Hogwarts."

The others nodded, as Harry felt flushed once again. He tried to maintain a straight face. At that point, Neville yawned.

"I'm sure we'll all be able to think clearly after some sleep, it's a couple of hours before Breakfast, so we might be able to get some," said Neville as he made his way forward, as a shortcut to the Gryffindor Common Room opened up in the wall.

"That sounds like a good idea to me as well, we have a lot to think about for today," said Luna as a shortcut to the Ravenclaw Common Room opened as well. With Neville and Luna gone, Harry leaned down to grab the Cloak and the Marauder's Map, along with his bag, but suddenly he collapsed on the table.

"Harry!" shouted Ginny, as she leapt up in surprise. Harry bent over, both hands clapped over his forehead, but he withdrew them, he could not even hold onto them without causing agony. "What's wrong?"

“Scar...hurting...throbbing...breaking out...” said Harry deliriously, as he faced down, the pain multiplying by several times, whatever that mysterious section his mind that he tried to isolate, it was trying to break out through his scar. Ginny reached forward, to grab Harry’s hand.

“Harry, just try and hang on, I’ll get you to the Hospital Wing,” said Ginny in a worried voice.

“No...Hospital Wing...Dumbledore will find out...pain relief potion...have to numb the pain...” said Harry as a bed appeared in the middle of the Room of Requirement. Ginny gently helped Harry lie down, as he appeared to be in absolutely pain. Much to her surprise, a completed pain relief potion had appeared in the Room of Requirement. Quickly, Ginny helped Harry drink it.

“Harry, don’t worry, everything will be okay,” muttered Ginny, as she wondered who exactly she was trying to convince. Harry stopped for a second, it appeared the pain relief potion had worked but at that second, Harry screamed in horror. It was almost like he was under the Cruciatus Curse. Harry raised his hands and it looked like he wanted to gouge his own eyes out but Ginny grabbed them in her hands. “Harry, I can’t let you do this, whatever this is, you can fight it, I know you can.”

“So much pain...end it...Ginny...end it please...no more suffering...kill me before its too late” babbled Harry as Ginny was taken aback, when Harry’s vivid green eyes turned into bright red for a brief second, but they turned back. It appeared Harry was mentally battling with a powerful force as they flickered back and forth a couple of times.

“Just fight it Harry, whatever’s happening, you’re strong enough to beat it,” said Ginny, as she held both of Harry’s hands tightly, to encourage him. Harry’s body continued to thrash in agony but it suddenly stopped. Ginny breathed a sigh of relief, Harry’s pain appeared to have stopped and he was still breathing.

Harry's forehead suddenly burst into flames. Ginny could hardly believe what she was seeing and she quickly pointed her wand towards the flames that was rising up from Harry's forehead.

"Aguamenti!" shouted Ginny desperately as she shot the water towards Harry's forehead, but it had evaporated just barely after it had left the wand. The heat coming from the flames from Harry's forehead was that intense, yet, amazingly, it had not spread. In fact, the flames were lowering until it vanished completely. Ginny leaned forward. There was not one burn on Harry's forehead despite the intensity of the heat and it took her several seconds before Harry managed to sit up. Ginny sat herself next to Harry.

"I'm fine Ginny right now, just give me a few seconds, my mind's just been assaulted with loads of information at once," said Harry, as Ginny eased over into Harry's lap. Harry wrapped his arm around Ginny, as Ginny leaned contently against him, relieved that Harry was alright. "Now I know how the diary felt after I stabbed it with the Basilisk fang."

"What do you mean you know how the diary felt?" asked Ginny quietly, puzzled to what Harry had meant.

"Horcrux, that word is buzzing through my mind, and it's coming to me, thousands of bits of information, all learned by Voldemort in his lifetime have just been absorbed into my memory, his memories as well, but they're all jumbled up, I can barely make any sense of it," said Harry. "The scar's gone isn't it?"

"Yes, Harry," said Ginny with a light nod.

"I think I know, Horcruxes, it comes back to that one word and it's coming to me what it means," said Harry as he blinked, his head buzzing from the insane amount of new information he received, very little of it in an order where he could easily recall it. "Yes, Voldemort, in his quest for immortality, had decided to make Horcruxes, seven of them in fact."

“What are Horcruxes, though?” asked Ginny with a frown, hoping that Harry could piece together that fact with whatever happened. “Does this have to do with those black shapes we saw split?”

“Yes, its all clear to me now, a Horcrux is made with the sacrifice of an untainted soul, that is murdering someone who has never killed before,” said Harry. “The soul splits in half and Voldemort obviously encased them in magical objects of great significance, but the first one was the diary, but that’s gone now. Also, I was one.”

“You mean Horcruxes can be living people!” shouted Ginny in surprise.

“Yes, apparently, Voldemort never intended to make me into a Horcrux, but something happened when he tried to kill me, his soul or whatever was left of it, had been ejected from his body and part of it had ripped off, before it went into a cut on my forehead, that turned into the scar, at least that’s what I think happened,” said Harry with a frown before he shook his head. “It doesn’t really matter now, it’s gone, it was painful and the Horcrux tried to kill me to take control of my body, but I won, thanks to you Ginny, if you weren’t here, I don’t even want to know how it would have turned out.”

“Harry, don’t count yourself out, you would have been able to defeat the Horcrux on your own,” said Ginny but Harry just shrugged.

“There are four more Horcruxes, there may have been five by now, the information I have only goes up to that night when Voldemort had killed me, and since I was unintentional, Voldemort may make another,” said Harry and Ginny looked at Harry, to encourage him to go on and it took a moment for Harry to make sense of the information drop in his mind. It would take a while to make sense of everything and even longer to learn any magic that Voldemort knew that would not have any dangerous side effects on himself. “A cup belonging to Helga Hufflepuff, a locket that blocked to Salazar Slytherin, a family ring from the wizard side of Voldemort’s family, and Ravenclaw’s Diadem, which is right here in this very room.”

Ginny looked up in surprise, she could hardly believe that Voldemort would hide a Horcrux right in Hogwarts.

"He thought no one else would find this room and he also thought that there would be no way that a fourteen wizard could escape from him," said Harry with a slight smirk. "Zero for Two today for Voldemort."

"So, we take the Horcrux and then what?" asked Ginny.

"Pour a little Basilisk venom on it and it should be taken care of," said Harry. "The Diadem's obviously no problem, the locket and the ring, no problem as well, just a few deadly defenses by Voldemort, somewhere in this jumbled up mess of memories there is a way to get around the defenses. No problem there, but the Hufflepuff Cup is in Gringotts, in the vault of one of his most devoted followers, Bellatrix Lestrange."

"That could be a problem," said Ginny in frustration. "The goblins won't let anything that they are trusted to keep safe without a fight. It would take an army to even get inside the bank, much less get close enough to breaking into the Vault."

"Good idea, Ginny, it might just work," said Harry and Ginny turned to him, before she looked at him with surprise. "Just thinking about something, if I do this right it might work, during my next meeting with Fudge, I have time this correctly, if I can get him to think that Dumbledore's plotting against him..."

"I get where you're coming from Harry," said Ginny with a nod, as she looked at Harry. "Do you think it will work?"

"I wouldn't try it if I wasn't sure it would," replied Harry, before he gave his head a shake, the buzzing within it from the information from the Horcrux had just ceased. "Now, we're here in the Room of Requirement, the Diadem is close by, no time like the present to get rid of it."

Harry concentrated on finding the Horcrux and it appeared right in front of him. This trick would not have worked with the other Horcruxes, but since it was in the Room of Requirement, it supplied the Horcrux immediately. Next, the sink appeared in the back of the

Room. Ginny slid off of Harry's lap to allow him to get up and walk forward to the sink, to retrieve.

"Voldemort is a bastard son of a Muggle," hissed Harry, using the new password that would open up the entrance of the Chamber of Secrets and he dropped down. Right at the bottom was a small makeshift office area where there was a box with several vials of Basilisk venom, treated with an anti-dissolving charm to help keep it in the vials. Harry turned to the snakes on the wall and once again spoke in Parseltongue. "Lift."

A lift appeared in the wall and Harry stepped inside, where it had carried him back up to Room of Requirement. Harry stepped in as a table appeared right next to the bed that Ginny sat on. The Diadem was on the floor, Harry could almost sense the same dark magic that he had to deal with earlier today. He levitated the Diadem up onto the table, where a glass case appeared. Harry dropped the Diadem into the case. He tapped his wand to the vial of Basilisk Venom, the anti-dissolving charms would be removed in sixty seconds. He placed the vial right in the Diadem and quickly sealed the box, where he put more anti-dissolving spells and then he sat down next to Ginny.

Seconds later, the basilisk venom began to dissolve the vial and right into the Diadem. The blood curdling shrieks of the Horcrux being burned into nothing echoed throughout the Room of Requirement.

"Silencio," muttered Harry, he did not want the screams to split both his and Ginny's skulls open, they were very loud, not to mention disturbing. The Diadem was reduced into a twisted, sickening black tar but even that dissolved by the Basilisk Venom. The Horcrux had been completely and utterly destroyed, without a trace.

"Three down, three to go," said Ginny in triumph, as she looked at the Basilisk Venom oozing in the glass case. There appeared to be not one bit of the Diadem left.

"Unless of course Voldemort made another one that I don't know about, remember he doesn't know about the misstep regarding me," replied Harry with a resigned sigh, as his mind still on all the actions

he would have to take to get enough people that would help overrun Gringotts so he could get his hands on one blasted cup.

“We’ll worry about that when the time comes,” said Ginny, as she turned to look into Harry’s eyes. “Even if Voldemort coming back did ruin it, you did win the Triwizard Tournament and I think that is a cause for celebration.”

Harry caught Ginny’s hint, he had a busy day and while there was much to do, it could be done later. He would not do the world much good if he had suffered a nervous breakdown due to overwork before it could be fixed. Ginny’s lips met Harry’s as they passionately kissed, their arms firmly wrapped around each other. Harry’s hands traveled down Ginny’s back, as she leaned in, both deepening the kiss. Slowly, Ginny poked her tongue into Harry’s mouth, Harry could see a mischievous look on her eyes. Harry slowly removed his arm from around her waist, as their tongues met and placed it on her bare leg. He felt her smooth skin, along with her breath, as she moaned inside his mouth. Slowly, his hand travelled down her leg. He paused, as his fingers were mere centimeters away from disappearing underneath her skirt. Ginny slowly pulled away from the kiss, as she looked at Harry, before she placed her mouth right next to his right ear.

“Please Harry, don’t stop now,” whispered Ginny, almost pleading with him, before her lips touched Harry’s ear, before she proceeded to slowly plant kisses down the side of his neck, as she felt Harry’s hand stroke her inner thigh, as it moved further underneath her. She stopped kissing Harry suddenly and Harry looked up, to see the frown on Ginny’s face.

“What’s wrong Ginny?” asked Harry, wondering briefly if he had done something to displease her.

“No, Harry, nothing you did was wrong, I was just thinking about that shirt you’re wearing, don’t get me wrong it’s a nice shirt, but I think it would look even better on the floor,” said Ginny playfully, as she grabbed Harry’s shirt. “May I?”

“If you wish,” said Harry with a grin and Ginny pulled Harry’s shirt over his head, before she discarded it on the floor of the Room of

Requirement. She breathed heavily, as she was well aware of where Harry's hand was but it gave her a feeling of absolute bliss as she felt his hand continue to move underneath her skirt. Not wanting to let Harry have all the fun, Ginny slowly planted kisses all over Harry's upper body, as he slowly laid back, to allow her to continue.

Harry felt pleasure beyond anything that he could have ever imagined. Ginny seemed to know exactly what buttons she needed to push, it was almost instinctive and judging by the sounds that he heard, he obviously was doing something right. The kisses continued to come, as every inch of his body tingled with pure bliss. He was aware that from where Ginny was positioned, it was causing his body to have some interesting reactions. Ginny slowly pulled herself up, before she slowly removed her shirt. Harry watched, as more and more of Ginny's skin was revealed, before she stopped, with the shirt rolled up below the underside of her breasts. Harry watched, Ginny looked at him, as she slowly pulled her hands away, teasing that she was not going go through with removing it.

Then, in a blink of an eye, Ginny completely lifted her shirt over her head, before she tossed it to the ground right next to Harry's. Harry marveled at how beautiful Ginny was and was really glad that witches matured faster their Muggle counterparts. Daringly, Ginny's right hand slowly traveled down his cheek, down the side of his neck, down his chest as it travelled further south with no signs of stopping. Ginny's left hand grabbed Harry's right hand and lifted it up, before she slowly lifted it up, and placed it on the outside of her faded light blue bra, with a wink.

Ginny felt Harry continue to explore every inch of her body, as her hand slipped down the front of Harry's pants. Her eyes widened, at her discovery. When Fleur Delacour had called Harry a "little boy", she could not be more wrong.

"Ginny," said Harry in a dazed voice, as the blood had rushed from his head when he felt what Ginny was doing.

"You like that, don't you Harry?" breathed Ginny hotly and Harry nodded, as the palms of his hands were placed on Ginny's breasts,

as he slowly managed to sit up. "I know you do, just as much as I like that."

Harry's pants soon joined the other clothes on the floor, as Ginny straddled Harry, before they continued to kiss. With each kiss, their desire increased, with each action.

"Ginny," whispered Harry suddenly, a small logical part of his brain kicking in, that had mostly taken a vacation when he was with Ginny. "We better stop before we do something we regret."

"I don't regret anything," muttered Ginny but her ability to think rationally had returned to her and she agreed with Harry. "I know Harry, you're right."

"Yes, the time will be right one day, don't worry, but it will be special," said Harry and Ginny nodded, as she looked into Harry's eyes. "Besides, we don't want any little surprises."

"That's true," said Ginny, who was not sure if she ever wanted any children, especially right now, as Harry leaned back. She laid next to her, her head on his shoulder, as they drifted to sleep next to each other.

Little would they know it would be the best night's sleep that either of them had gotten in their entire life.

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In the Wizengamot Court Room, a chained Peter Pettigrew sat in one chair, where Sirius Black had sat across. Both were guarded by Ministry Aurors, as the entire Wizengamot, minus Harry Potter who had not reclaimed his seat as of yet, had showed up. Fudge walked into the courtroom with Dolores Umbridge closely behind him.

"Very well, today I am here to correct a terrible injustice, it appears that we were mistaken of the events of the morning of the second of November, the year of 1981," said Fudge in a booming voice. "On that day, Sirius Black was believed to have murdered Peter Pettigrew, along with twelve innocent bystanders, along with several more

injured in the process. It took several hours to clear up what had gone wrong and Black was thrown into Azkaban after he had been judged guilty. Today, Dolores Umbridge, Amelia Bones, and myself will interrogate both Mr. Pettigrew and Mr. Black, who have been given Veritaserum."

The members of the court had sat, in attention, as Fudge turned to Sirius Black first.

"Were you the Secret Keeper of Lily and James Potter?" asked Fudge.

"No I was not, we switched to Peter Pettigrew at the last moment," said Sirius.

"And why did you switch to Mr. Pettigrew?" asked Fudge.

"We thought it was the perfect bluff, it would throw everyone off but we never knew Peter was a spy for Lord Voldemort," said Sirius blandly, as the members of the court, with the exception of Dumbledore, flinched. "In a foolish moment, I went after him."

"Will you tell the court what really happened on the unfortunate morning in question?" asked Madam Bones.

"I cornered Peter in the alley and he blurted out about how I betrayed Lily and James, before he shot a curse behind my back, he intended to kill me, but I managed to put up a shield charm at the last second," said Sirius "Several Muggles were caught in the crossfire, the entire street was destroyed, and Peter had managed to escape under the guise of a rat, his Animagus form, before he made his way into the sewers."

"I must say, I don't recall Mr. Pettigrew registering as an Animagus, his name is not on the Ministry record," said Umbridge sweetly. "Could you please explain the circumstances that caused Mr. Pettigrew to become an Animagus?"

"It was because of her friend Remus Lupin, he's a werewolf, myself, Peter, and James all became Animagi to try and make the full moons a bit better for him," said Sirius, unable to keep from spilling everything. Several of the members of the Wizengamot looked at Sirius as if he contained some kind of disgusting disease for socializing with a werewolf.

"Did you realize the danger of hanging around such a dangerous creature?" asked Umbridge. "Surely you realized that you could have gotten bitten?"

"Dolores, I believe that is irrelevant for this case," said Madam Bones quickly, as she had no desire to hear Umbridge's known prejudices overshadow an important trial.

"Yes it is, Dolores, please restrain yourself," said Fudge.

"Of course Minister," said Umbridge in her sickening sweet tone.

"I believe that we have learned all we need to know from Sirius Black, let us here Mr. Pettigrew's side of this story," suggested Fudge and Bones and Umbridge nodded in agreement, before Fudge turned to Peter. "Who knew of the switch between yourself and Mr. Black?"

"Sirius, Lily, James, and Albus Dumbledore were the only one's that knew that we switched," said Peter blandly and Fudge looked excited, as he could see the sickened look that appeared on Dumbledore's face. It was almost like Christmas came early and brought all the other holidays home for the ride.

"Why did you join He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named?" asked Fudge, who would worry about ruining Dumbledore later.

"Dumbledore had came to me, to convince me that I would be a perfect spy for the Order of the Phoenix, this was before Snape switched sides obviously, to fake joining the Dark Lord, he would never expect that I would dare try and deceive him," said Peter in a numb voice.

“Minister, if I may, I doubt this is relevant to this case...” interrupted Dumbledore who had no wish to have the mistake he made with Peter brought up. He had offered him such an important decision, because he was afraid he would turn to darkness because he had felt so weak. He had never knew that it would actually speed up his decline down the wrong path.

“Oh, Albus, I believe this is very relevant,” said Fudge, as he waved off Dumbledore’s concerns. “When was the moment when you decided to join He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named for real?”

“When I saw that his side was better organized than Dumbledore could manage,” said Peter. “Dumbledore was always evasive, he never really let anyone in on what he wanted to accomplish, where the Dark Lord always was crystal clear on his goals, we always knew where he was coming from. I would have more of a chance to succeed by his side, than Dumbledore would ever offer. Not to mention, as long as I was on that side, I would always be in the shadow of Sirius, James, and Remus.”

“Did you intend to kill Sirius Black on that morning?” asked Madam Bones.

“Yes, it was not premeditated, but rather spur of the moment, I was cornered, but the fact I framed him had allowed me to live and was just as good as killing him,” bragged Peter.

“So, the evidence is clear, the crimes that Peter Pettigrew committed were wrongly attributed to Sirius Black and it is clear what the members of the Wizengamot must do to ensure justice,” said Fudge boldly. “Let’s put this matter to a vote now.”

“All in favor of imprisoning Peter Pettigrew and clearing Sirius Black of all charges,” said Madam Bones and nearly every hand in the Wizengamot raised their hand, with only a couple of exceptions. A few were raised reluctantly, with Dumbledore’s being the most obvious. “All against.”

A couple of hands were raised, but it did not matter, the majority had already spoken.

“Sirius Black has been cleared of all charges,” said Fudge, as the Auror had administered the antidote, before he turned to two Aurors next to Pettigrew. “Take him out of my sight.”

Sirius had got to his feet, a triumphant look on his face, as Dumbledore looked at him, it was obvious that the Headmaster wanted to talk to him, but Fudge had joined him as he had walked into the corridors.

“Mr. Black, if you could report to my office within the next couple of minutes, so we can transfer the custody of Harry Potter from those Muggles over to you,” said Fudge, who was eager to do something that would put him even more in Harry’s good graces and cast Dumbledore in an even worse light.

“Gladly, Minister,” said Sirius as Dumbledore had attempted to walk in between them. Sirius sighed, he better acknowledge the Headmaster’s presence. “Hello Albus, I must say it was nice to get that trial that I should have gotten fourteen years ago.”

“I’m glad, you’re satisfied with the results Sirius, but I must ask you both to reconsider removing Harry from the Dursleys,” said Dumbledore as both Sirius and Fudge looked at him like he had grown a second head. “It could lead to disastrous consequences if he leaves the safety of that home.”

“Let me guess, Albus,” said Fudge in a bored voice. “Harry must remain with those Muggles for...I believe the term is, the Greater Good, isn’t it?”

“For his own safety, Cornelius,” amended Dumbledore.

“I doubt that there is any good reason why Harry should return there, especially considering the Ministry has accumulated evidence over the years that strongly points to a borderline abusive home for young Harry,” said Fudge and Sirius stared at Fudge, as he wondered why this had not been brought up before, but wisely did not say anything. “But, very well Albus, I’m all ears. Perhaps I overlooked a reason why

Harry should return to what may be an even worse home than Azkaban.”

“I have my reasons for sending Harry back there, Cornelius,” said Dumbledore, who could not point out the blood protections, as they were technically classified as dark magic.

“The thing as Albus, your reasons do not hold as much water as they do with me in the past,” said Fudge smoothly. “Come now, Mr. Black, we do have to get the paperwork in order, the year at Hogwarts does end in a couple of days and I doubt you want Harry to spend even a minute with the Dursleys.”

Sirius followed Fudge into the office, as the door shut, as he left Dumbledore on the outside. Dumbledore stopped, Harry had returned to the Dursleys without argument each and every year, but that was because he did not have a viable alternative. Now, he did have one with Sirius’s name cleared, Dumbledore knew it would disrupt his eventual plans with Harry if he had tried to personally force the issue. A rift between the two was the last thing Dumbledore needed right now.

Sirius and Fudge had returned to the office about a half of an hour later. The Minister had already walked off down a corridor.

“Sirius, a word if you please,” said Dumbledore and Sirius just turned to walk with Dumbledore. “Now, Sirius, I must insist that Harry returns to the Dursleys for a month. You have the power to send him now there and it is for his own protection. When Lily died, her sacrifice created a blood protection based on love between Harry and Petunia Dursley. As long as Harry stays there, no one meaning him harm could touch him.”

“Except when they come from inside the house, Fudge had shared with me some interesting reading material, he mentioned that you might have convinced him to keep it out of the sight of Amelia Bones, I doubt she would have allowed Harry to remain there,” said Sirius and Dumbledore at least had the decency to look ashamed. “Look Dumbledore, I know you think you mean well, but with Harry, you don’t have a clue. I really feel sorry for you when your next great

adventure comes up, because you're going to have to face Lily and James for what you put their son through during his childhood."

"I'm sorry you feel that way Sirius," said Dumbledore who knew there would be no way to change Sirius's mind. "I will not press the issue with Harry, but I do have a favor that I must ask of you."

"What is it, Albus?" asked Sirius.

"Now that your name has been cleared, I believe you now have possession of the Black family home, Number Twelve Grimmauld place and the protections that were placed around it by your ancestors will make it perfect for the headquarters of the Order of the Phoenix," said Dumbledore. "As you know, Lord Voldemort has returned and we need to set up everything immediately."

Sirius remained slightly, his first instinct was to tell Dumbledore to take his Order and shove it, as it all he managed to do the first time around was to get several good people killed by his convoluted chess game. Then, he would much rather have Dumbledore close by, where he could keep an eye on him and his mind flashed back to Lily's letter that Harry had showed him, that was the genesis for Harry's newly acquired cunning. Sirius felt his godson would have agreed one hundred percent.

"Very well Albus, when is a good time to meet with you to make arrangements to get everything set up?" asked Sirius.

"Tomorrow at noon would be good enough, Sirius," said Dumbledore and Sirius nodded in response to Dumbledore.

"I look forward to it, Headmaster," answered Sirius.

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Vernon Dursley read the evening paper in a bad mood. He had been brought up on charges of sexual harassment from his secretary, the third one this year. Two proposed deals had fell threw in the last week. The stock in his company was down and dropping by the day. Not to mention the fact that his son Dudley had been expelled from

school. Apparently he had been caught with drugs, but Vernon refused to believe such rubbish. It was obvious that some jealous person had planted them on Dudley, to frame him. On the bright side, the boy would be home shortly, at least there would be someone to take out his aggression on.

The door burst open and a small army of the ugliest looking creatures that Vernon had ever seen in his life had entered his home. They had only come up to his waist, but they looked foul tempered.

“WHAT IN THE DEVIL ARE YOU DOING?” shouted Vernon angrily. “GET OUT OF MY HOUSE WHATEVER YOU ARE OR I’LL CALL THE POLICE.”

One of the creatures had calmly walked over and pulled his phone plug out of the wall, before it threw the phone across the room. It smashed to bits. Vernon rose up to his feet and swung his fist angrily towards the creature, but it had caught his arm and with surprising strength had flung him across the room.

“You will do nothing to us, human,” grunted the creature. “We are goblins, we represent the wizard bank Gringotts, and you have defrauded us.”

“What are you talking about?” demanded Vernon as Dudley and Petunia had exited the kitchen, but half of the goblins crowded them. “We have nothing to with freak stuff, that’s the boy.”

“Ah yes, the boy, the boy you stole money from,” said one of the goblins and Petunia and Vernon both paled, times were tight, and they used that extra money to buy extra presents for Dudley. After all, a growing boy could not get along with only thirty presents.

“Listen you freakish things, get out of my house!” shouted Vernon angrily, as his back was in agony.

“It’s our house now,” said a second goblin with a sadistic grin. “We will sell this house, but I doubt that it will be enough to cover the amount of money that you stole from the Boy-Who-Lived. In fact, until

the moment you pay him off, your entire paycheck will be deposited directly into his Gringotts account.”

“Yes, you are to get out of this house, in five minutes,” added another goblin.

“What are we supposed to do?” asked Petunia in a horrified voice. “Where are we supposed to live. You just can’t kick us out without any warning.”

“We have just given you a warning, now get out now,” threatened one of the goblin viciously, with no remorse at all.

“Yes, out now, we goblins don’t tolerate your type at all, had you committed the crimes you had in the goblin world against a defenseless child, you would have been executed in the most painful and imaginative way possible,” said the lead goblin but he sighed in what could have been interpreted as disappointment. “But since you’re not goblins, we just have to settle for ruining the rest of your life.”

“You can’t do this to me, you’ll hear from my attorney!” shouted Vernon angrily but the goblins paid him no mind, as the Dursleys were magically bounced from the house, right into the street. The moment they looked up, the house had vanished. There was no trace that it had ever even stood on Privet Drive.

And that’s it for this chapter, as we move into the fifth year within the next few chapters. I think I have some interesting plans for the future, but we’ll see how they actually pan out on paper once I get to those points.

Chapter Fourteen: Necessity

"There you are Harry, your Triwizard winnings, normally there would be an elaborate ceremony, but after all that had happened the Ministry feels that it is not something that we have the time for," said Fudge as he slid Harry a bag that was full of gold. Harry looked at it. To him it was pocket change but he feigned interest nevertheless. An illusion of the lightning bolt scar remained on his forehead, he did not want the world to know he got rid of it just yet. A year ago, he would have jumped onto it, but now he had matured enough to realize it would raise too many questions that would be counterproductive to answer at this point in time.

"That might be just as well Minister," said Harry as he took the gold, he had big plans with it and for once, they were not investing in Fudge's ego. "The aftermath in the Third Task, it's chaotic to say the least."

"Well at least one good thing came out of it, a horrible injustice was corrected, technically two of them," said Fudge and Harry nodded, Sirius was cleared, which meant he did not have to return to the Dursleys. It was a glorious day. "And after the news that I just received, there will be no chance of Dumbledore sending you back there to begin with."

"Really how so?" asked Harry, who fully expected Dumbledore to have another last minute trick up his sleeve to attempt to force him back under the care of his hated relatives. While it was unlikely that he would get away with it with Harry officially in Sirius's custody, Harry had learned not to put anything past Dumbledore.

"Well the goblins, they seemed to have uncovered some fraud that the Dursleys committed against them and kicked them out of their house, before taking it away, quite literally in fact," said Fudge with an amused chuckle. While he was not too fond of the goblins, considering the fact that they repeatedly flaunted their nose at Ministry authority and had refused to cooperate with Ministry officials. Still, there was a time where they directed their hatred of humans to those who truly deserved it and this was one of those occasions.

“Well, I guess I don’t have to worry about the Dursleys again,” said Harry calmly, but one day, revenge would be sweet. “I don’t know how Dumbledore could have thought it was a good idea to send me there. I mean, my letter was addressed to the cupboard underneath the stairs, surely that could have been a tip off that something was wrong.”

“So he knew all this time,” muttered Fudge triumphantly, if he played his cards right, he could get Dumbledore thrown in Azkaban for being an accessory to child abuse and neglect. That way he would not be a threat to Fudge’s power. He had to be careful not to take too harsh of a stance against Dumbledore, because he did have his share of supporters in the Ministry and they could make Fudge’s life difficult. Fudge looked at Harry, who sat there calmly. “I wonder what else Dumbledore might be up to.”

“I wouldn’t know Minister, he doesn’t exactly tell me anything,” said Harry and Fudge nodded, but Harry decided to drop the one hint that would be most beneficial to his plans. “For all I know he is trying to train the students at Hogwarts in combat so he can overthrow the Ministry or something like that.”

“A-ha, I knew there was a reason why he hired Moody!” cried Fudge, who looked pleased at the theory that Harry had presented to him. It did explain a lot of Dumbledore’s actions over the previous years.

“Of course, I’m just speculating Minister, I could be wrong about it after all,” said Harry but he left Fudge enough room to allow him to believe that Dumbledore was against him, even if Harry had just thrown that out on a whim, but anything that took Dumbledore down several pegs would only benefit Harry’s vision for the future of the Wizarding World.

“Yes, but you could be onto something Harry, I mean Dumbledore’s always wanted this job, he’s just said he doesn’t to throw me off to his plans, yes that must be it,” said Fudge as he looked at Harry. “Of course he would brainwash the students into doing his dirty work, look what he tried to do to you, I think there was a reason why he wanted you at the Dursleys, to come across as a great savior to you,

thankfully you managed to get away from his trap in time, before it was too late.”

Harry was spared by answering by a knock on the door of the Minister’s office.

“Come in,” said Fudge in an absent minded voice and the door opened to reveal the smug form of Lucius Malfoy, who barely acknowledged Harry’s presence as he had entered the office. “Ah Lucius, what a pleasant surprise. I did not expect you to come to the Ministry until later this evening.”

“I felt it was necessary to arrive early, given all the rumors that had reached me that Dumbledore has spread about He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named returning,” said Lucius calmly.

“Yes those rumors must be silenced, we do not want to cause a panic, there is proof that He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named perished and after all, he sits right in our midst,” said Fudge as he turned to Harry with a nod. “Harry, I trust you know Lucius Malfoy.”

“Yes, we met,” said Harry as Lucius turned to him and briefly he could see a few scars on the elder Malfoy’s lower arm that he quickly turned to hide. It was obvious that Lucius paid the price for allowing Harry to slip away with Voldemort’s wand. “Hello, Mr. Malfoy, I hope you are well.”

“As well as can be expected, Mr. Potter,” said Lucius coolly, he knew Potter was taunting him but he could not retaliate in the Minister’s office. “What brings you to the Ministry of Magic on this day? Given the events of the third task of the Triwizard Tournament, I would think you would not be on your feet this soon.”

“Duty calls, Mr. Malfoy, I am the last surviving member of a prominent pureblood family and I have certain things I must learn, including my way around the Ministry,” said Harry.

“Charming,” said Lucius blandly as he looked at Harry. He wondered why the boy would have such a desire to learn anything he can about the Ministry now and once again, he briefly thought that perhaps it

was Potter who had been the one who had influenced several laws that would benefit him recently being blocked, along with several that would push back his agenda being passed through. If this was the case, then sooner or later, Potter would make a political misstep that Lucius could take advantage of. After all, he was a teenager and prone to mistakes.

“Indeed,” replied Harry, who knew as long as Lucius lived he would be a problem, as the Malfoys was one of the few families that could match the Potters in wealth. Even with the additional gold his mother had given him, Lucius could still be an even match if he could pool together the resources of his followers. Still, sooner or later, Lucius would make a political misstep that Harry could take advantage of. After all, he was a blood purist and prone to arrogance.

“Harry and I was just talking about how Dumbledore might be using the students of Hogwarts to form an army to overthrow the Ministry of Magic,” said Fudge. “I knew you had always told me that Dumbledore might be after my job, but now I have the proof I need.”

“This is serious Minister,” said Lucius, who sensed the perfect opportunity to get into the Dark Lord’s good graces as well. “Perhaps it would be prudent to pass a couple of education decrees that would allow us more power to in choosing who will teach Defense Against the Dark Arts. Perhaps a more theoretical approach would be necessary for the future classes, to restrict their ability to rise up and become a threat against the Ministry.”

“Excellent idea, Lucius,” said Fudge with a brightened look before he turned to Harry. “What do you think Harry?”

“Whatever you think is necessary for the safety of the magical population of this country, Minister,” said Harry with a bored shrug, but both the Minister and Lucius was playing directly into his hands.

Lucius sat there in silence, he expected Potter to protest this suggested reform. After all, he was witness to the Dark Lord’s return, surely if anyone wanted practical Defense education, it would be him. He was up to something but Lucius was at a loss to figure out what.

"I best get back to Hogwarts and allow you two to have your meeting, I have to pack, the train leaves tomorrow," said Harry and Fudge nodded.

"Very well, I suspect I'll see you quite a bit over this summer, Harry," said Fudge.

"Count on it Minister and I may see you very soon as well, Mr. Malfoy," said Harry as he looked at Lucius who just nodded before Harry departed from the Minister's office with his Triwizard winnings, leaving the two men to discuss whatever.

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Harry dropped down in the Room of Requirement, where Neville, Luna, and Ginny were waiting for him.

"How did the meeting go Harry?" asked Ginny, as Harry sat down right beside her.

"Fudge had fallen for my offhand comment about Dumbledore training the students for combat," said Harry in an off handed voice. "Now he's going interfere here at Hogwarts, especially with the Defense Against the Dark Arts education."

"Yes, but can you be sure that idea that you planted in Fudge's mind, can't be traced back to you?" asked Luna logically.

"If everything goes right, Dumbledore and the Ministry will be too busy with each other to give a damn about anything that I did, that way I can fully worry about dealing with Voldemort," answered Harry. "The four of us, as talented as you three are, won't be enough to defeat Voldemort and his followers. No offense of course."

"None taken Harry," said Neville, who was aware of his improvements over the past year but still slightly uneasy on how he would do against actual Death Eaters.

"No, I can see where you're going, Voldemort has an unknown number of Death Eaters," said Ginny.

“Four hundred and seventy three, although only maybe a couple dozen of them are anything of value, most of them are just warm bodies that he throws into battle to shoot spells to cause chaos,” said Harry a bit dazed at the random piece of information that had just popped into his head. “Of course, a fair few might have gone insane in Azkaban or killed since Voldemort tried to kill me the first time, but he does have followers all over the world, not just in the United Kingdom, and he will recruit fresh blood into his Death Eaters.”

“Then we must discourage anyone from joining up with him,” said Ginny with a confident expression that made her ten times more beautiful to Harry than she already was, which was really something.

“The next step, then, I suppose,” said Luna. “We have to fight fire with fire, otherwise we’re be the ones that get burned.”

“How many would we need?” asked Neville and the others looked at each other.

“As many as we can manage, the conflict between Voldemort and Dumbledore has created a vacuum, that many good people will be sucked into,” responded Harry. “We need to see how many of these people we can rescue from this power vacuum that might be of use when we rebuild the world.”

The group nodded, before they went left the Room of Requirement. The Hogwarts Express would be leaving tomorrow and they needed to make sure everything was packed before they made they left for the year.

Harry and Ginny were alone in the Gryffindor Common Room when they looked at each other.

“So, everything’s going as planned Harry, you got away from the Dursleys and now are going to live with Sirius,” said Ginny with a smile before she frowned. “I just have to sneak away from the Burrow to visit you, but that should be no problem. With the portkeys that you gave me, you can just retrieve me when the coast is clear. Speaking of which, did you ever figure out what went wrong in the Graveyard?”

“Actually, yes it was a minor glitch, apparently using a regular Portkey near the retrievable Portkey will cause magical interference that will render the retrievable one useless for a time,” said Harry. “I’m working on fixing it but for right now, don’t use it near a regular portkey.”

“Okay Harry,” said Ginny, before they kissed each other good night. They held each other for several minutes, before they went their separate ways to the Common Room.

Little did they know, that after they had slept in the same bed in the Room of Requirement, sleeping in several beds would be such a difficult thing to do. Both Harry and Ginny spent the majority of time tossing and turning, before they just managed to get to sleep, but even then it was only a few minutes at a time.

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Hermione Granger was not having a very good last couple of months. It all started when she had attempted to slip that love potion to Harry. She was just correcting a mistake that happened, they were destined to be together, it was not right that Ginny slipped in and took what was rightfully hers. That one act had turned the entire school against her. Sure the Slytherins were their usual snide selves and while they did not care about Harry, it did not stop them from using it as an excuse to mock Hermione. In particular, Pansy Parkinson could always be heard saying underneath her breath that Hermione was so ugly, that even a love potion could not help her land a boy.

Her own housemates were worse. Groups of them followed Hermione around, watching her every move and hovered around her when in the Common Room. She could not get anything done and when she had gotten even remotely close to Harry, it seemed like a group of them had blocked her path, so she could not get anywhere close to Harry. It was frustrating, especially considering the only person that would talk her in the entire school was Ron and he was not exactly prime intelligent conversation material.

Hermione harbored a deep hatred for Ginny Weasley. If she had not tried to take advantage of Harry when he was at his lowest point, none of this would happen. Hermione would make the girl pay for what she done and everything would be the way it should be. Everything had gone wrong, but once Ginny was out of the way, everything would be right again. The moment Ginny let her guard down, Hermione would have her and then take back what was rightfully hers. She just needed the perfect opportunity. It was destiny.

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"You are certain that this will restore me to my full greatness, Severus," said Voldemort skeptically, as he tried to ignore the stabbing pain his right side. He was glad for his Horcruxes, without them, he would have died the moment that Potter's polluted blood had entered his body.

"Very certain, my Lord," said Snape, as the potion had been brewed perfectly, much against his reservations, but Dumbledore had insisted on it. "Just a word, these will need to be taken approximately every ninety days, otherwise the effects may regress. In the meantime, I shall look for a more permanent solution for your problem."

"See that they are brewed every ninety days then Severus, until you come across that solution," responded Voldemort. "I expect you to analyze my blood from every angle. I refuse to show weakness, my followers will tremble at my power. Now as for the information that you had promised me..."

"Right here my Lord, every known member of the Order of the Phoenix and some of Dumbledore's key supporters within the Ministry of Magic, men that I've personally seen him speak with," said Snape as he handed Voldemort the information that Dumbledore had given him. "I hope it will be to your satisfaction."

"I'm certain it will be Severus, but it is only the beginning, once the Order of the Phoenix reforms, I want concrete information beyond names, I want any plans you are let in on," said Voldemort.

“One thing I did find out about, they’re guarding the Prophecy, you know the one,” said Snape and Voldemort nodded. “Dumbledore plans to have regular shifts and guards to keep an eye on it. He believes you might be after it.”

“For once, Dumbledore is correct,” said Voldemort softly as he looked at Severus. “Depart, it is unwise for you to linger, I will call on you when I need you.”

“Of course, my Lord,” said Snape as he bowed before he turned away from the Dark Lord and walked off.

Voldemort sat back, he trusted no one, Snape especially, but as long as he had use for the man’s talents, he would allow Snape to remain alive. If nothing else, his teaching skills had prevented a number of perspective Aurors from joining. That helped his plans tremendously.

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For once Harry looked forward to returning from Hogwarts, as the train moved closer to King’s Cross Station. His godfather’s name was cleared and he would never have to see the Dursleys again, although he had a feeling that he might someday, he did have thirteen years of “hospitality” to thank them for. Not to mention if everything went as planned, with the meetings he just began to have with the Hogwarts Board of Governors a couple of weeks prior to the final task, then next year would be very interesting.

“Another year done,” said Luna sadly as she looked out the window. “It seems like these things do go by awfully fast.”

“Yes, they do,” agreed Harry.

“But look on the bright side, next year will be here right before we know it,” said Ginny.

“That’s true,” agreed Luna with a nod of her head.

“Besides we can keep in touch, it’s not like we’re going to be isolated with each other,” answered Neville.

“Only use letters for trivial stuff that no one but us could carry about, I have a feeling Voldemort’s going to keep an eye on the owl post, especially if it’s coming to me or anyone close to me,” said Harry. “Anything crucial I find out, I’ll be sure to get through you immediately through the communication on the portkeys.”

The three nodded, as the train had moved to a stop. Quickly, Harry got up to his feet, with the other three following closely behind him. He saw a pair of identical red haired figures standing on the side of the train, as he held the Triwizard winnings out.

“Ah Fred and George, just the gentlemen I wanted to see,” said Harry.

“If it isn’t Harry, long time, no see, Harry, but then again you’ve been busy with the tournament,” said George.

“But, if you wanted to see gentlemen, I would think we would be the last two people you would want to see,” answered Fred with a smile.

“Nevertheless, what can we do for you?” asked George.

“I’ve heard that you two want to open a joke shop,” said Harry. “And I’d like to invest in it with the money that I won in the Triwizard Tournament.”

Fred and George exchanged looks, as if they thought Harry had lost his mind. He was throwing away a thousand galleons, on them of all people; they did not understand it at all.

“Harry, a thousand galleons, that’s more than we could ever use,” answered George in a hushed voice.

“We can’t accept this,” said Fred as he waved his hand, as Harry had attempted to give them the money.

“Actually, you can or I’ll hex you,” said Ginny as she stepped forward.

“Now Harry, that’s low, having our little sister threaten us if we don’t accept the money,” said George, but he looked slightly fearful. They

had remembered what happened the time they had accidentally decapitated Ginny's favorite doll when she was five. It still traumatized them to this day.

"Besides, a thousand galleons, surely you need it more than we do," argued Fred.

"No, actually not, a thousand galleons to me are like a knut is to most wizards," said Harry as the others nodded, it may have been a bit of an overstatement on Harry's part about how much a thousand galleons was worth to him.

"Just think of it, Mum says that you are throwing your lives away by thinking about this joke shop, Harry is offering you the means to prove her wrong," answered Ginny and Fred and George looked at each other. Their mother had discouraged their dream whenever they had and it was a foolish dream without the capital.

"Alright, since you twisted our arm," said George as he shook his head.

"Still, I can't believe that you're giving us a thousand galleons with no strings attached," said Fred.

"It just goes to show you that if you look up a picture of an eccentric rich guy in the dictionary, I bet Harry's face would be right there," said George as Harry handed them the money.

"Now, there is just one tiny catch, but it won't be too much trouble," said Harry. "There are times where I may have to call upon your genius to invent me something that is a bit more serious than your standard work."

Fred and George exchanged a look. Both were coming to the same conclusion, Harry was not as naïve as he had been in the previous years. Their little sister was having a very bad influence on him. While Ron had ranted about how Harry was corrupting Ginny, the twins had a feeling it might have been slightly the other way around. Still, on their own, they might each be a force to be reckoned with, but together,

there might be no one who could stop Harry and Ginny when they had set their minds on something.

“Okay Harry, it’s more than fair after all,” said George with a nod as he faced Harry, before he took the bag of gold.

“I still think this is too much, but your conditions are good enough, just get in touch of us if you need my help,” said Fred, as the Twins went off their separate ways, leaving Harry, Luna, Neville, and Ginny alone, before the group turned to each other, as people began to board the train.

“There’s my grandmother,” answered Neville as he craned his neck to see his grandmother’s very distinctive hat with a stuffed vulture on top. “I better go, you three have a nice summer.”

“You too Neville,” said Harry, as Ginny and Luna also waved good bye.

“My father should be arriving soon, providing the Nargles had not stolen his watch again,” said Luna calmly, as if this was an all too regular occurrence. “I should go find him, I’ll talk to both of you as soon as possible.”

“Okay, Luna have a good summer, we’ll see you soon,” said Ginny.

“Yeah, Luna, keep in touch,” added Harry, as both Harry and Ginny were alone with each other. Sirius had wrote to him, saying that he would be at the station about five minutes after the train had left, saying that he had finish up some last minute things to get the house ready, whatever it meant. “Ginny, if your mother gives you any static about our relationship, contact me immediately, I have a couple of plans that will neutralize her.”

“I thought she would have said something by now, I know Ron wouldn’t have kept his mouth shut,” said Ginny who was confused, but she had saw her mother approach the King’s Cross station. She leaned forward and wrapped her hands around Harry’s neck, before she leaned forward and kissed Harry. Harry returned the kiss, their tongues meeting together, as Ginny played with his hair. They were

attracting a few stares, but neither really cared. They broke apart, as they stared in each other's eyes for a few minutes. "I'll see you soon Harry."

"Whenever it is, it won't be soon enough," answered Harry and Ginny nodded in agreement. Harry was thankful that there were a number of things that he had to do to prepare for Voldemort until the time he saw Ginny again.

"We agree on that," said Ginny, as she caught the look her mother gave her and just frowned. It wasn't like she was doing anything her mother had never done, considering the fact they had seven kids.

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Molly Weasley watched the overly passionate and entirely inappropriate farewell that her daughter and Harry enjoyed. Once she had received Ron's letter talking about their relationship, Molly had an internal struggle within herself. On one hand, she did not want her daughter to date anyone until she was of age, but on the other hand, it was Harry and she was fonder of that boy than she was of her own children. The poor boy, his parents got killed, he was given to those horrid Muggles, and his godfather got himself put into Azkaban because of his own rash actions. Upsetting Ginny would in turn upset Harry and she was not sure that she wanted that on her conscience. Not to mention the fact that she wrote to Albus Dumbledore, asking for his advice and he wrote back to forbid her from interfering in their relationship. He mentioned something about it being for the best. So Molly just bit her tongue, even though she was worried about the reputation that Ginny would for dating at such a young age, Dumbledore knew best. Besides, if anyone could keep Ginny anchored, it would be Harry. He seemed like a sensible young man and would make sure that Ginny would not get too out of control, that she would remain true to the traditional role of a female.

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"Hello, Harry," said Sirius as he approached his godson with a good nature smile, before he bent down so only Harry and himself could

hear each other. "How you have been holding up after what happened?"

"I've been good enough, the fact that Voldemort returned is going to make it tough on all of us, but he's just one symptom to the great disease that plagues the Wizarding World," said Harry and Sirius knew that Harry was referring to Lily's letter. It appeared that Harry was taking what she said to heart and after twelve years in Azkaban, without a trial, Sirius was inclined to believe that there needed to be some changes made so no other lives were ruined.

"Indeed, this Portkey taking us back to my house, I do apologize, it's in shambles, no one's lived there since my mother died except for the house elf and he hasn't done all that much to help tidy up," said Sirius as he shook his head, before he held out what appeared to be an old and worn rag for Harry to touch. They double checked to make sure the coast was clear, before Sirius activated the Portkey, to take them to his home.

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The moment they touched down, Sirius quickly entered the door. The house was covered in cobwebs and it had a foreboding aura with in it. Harry held his wand steady, while he trusted Sirius, he did not trust this house, as the two made their way down the hallway.

"Keep quiet as we pass here, we don't want to wake my mother up," whispered Sirius.

"I thought you said she was dead," hissed Harry in a confused voice.

"Well in a matter of speaking, but her charming personality lives on through her painting," said Sirius quietly and Harry could sense a bit of sarcasm through his godfather's words. They passed a worn black curtain. Sirius held his breath in until they had completely passed it. "Into the kitchen Harry, we tidied up as much as possible, but it's still a far cry from what it should be."

They entered the kitchen and it appeared to be dusty, but at least cleaner than the hallway was. At least it did not have the putrid smell

at any rate. Harry sat down on the table as Sirius sat down right across from him.

“Dumbledore is still getting people together for the Order, he said he should be able to have regular meetings next week, granted I’m not supposed to tell you any of this, but considering this is my house and Dumbledore’s not here, I don’t see any problem,” answered Sirius as he looked around. “Remus is here too, it was just the full moon last night so he’s recovering downstairs. He thanks you for getting the Wolfsbane Potion for him, even though he also says you didn’t have to do it.”

“So, Dumbledore says that he’s going to start having meetings for this Order of the Phoenix here next week,” said Harry, who thought of what monitoring charms that he could use that Dumbledore might not think to look for, because he wanted to keep an ear out on what Dumbledore was up to. “In this very room, in fact.”

“Yes, Harry,” answered Sirius as he raised his eyebrow but he saw a figure lurking in the shadows that had broken his concentration. “KREACHER!”

“Yes, Master Sirius,” said the house elf in a deep voice, as he bowed down to Sirius before he muttered. “Blood traitor, just got cleared and thinks he can tell Kreacher what to do.”

“Harry, this is the house elf that I told you about, Kreacher, he is a little bit touched in the head, he’s been listening to my mother’s portrait for too often,” said Sirius before he turned to Kreacher. “Kreacher, since Harry is here, you will listen to anything he says and if he feels you are disobeying him, he has my full permission to use you for target practice for any hexes he chooses. Is that understood, Kreacher?”

“Yes, Master Sirius,” said Kreacher with a bow as he opened his mouth to say something snide but Sirius never gave him a chance to speak up.

“And do us a favor and fix something to eat, it’s late in the afternoon,” said Sirius and Kreacher bowed. “And make sure you fix it to a

standard that's up to humanity and don't do anything to taint it. In fact, you will taste everything that you fix first where I can see you doing it. And maybe if you do this right and you're lucky, I'll grant you your wish of having of having your head mounted on the wall"

"As Master wishes," said Kreacher as he quickly moved off.

"Er, his wish of having his head mounted on the wall?" asked Harry in a confused voice, as he looked at Sirius.

"Yes, that's been his ambition since as long as I can remember, most house elves are kept in line by threatening clothes, I can keep this one in line by promising decapitation if he toes the line," muttered Sirius.

"He is mental," said Harry and Sirius responded with a nod.

"You have no idea," said Sirius as he shook his head as Kreacher muttered under his breath as he prepared lunch.

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"And your room is the third to the right," said Sirius after lunch, as he was showing Harry around. "It's the cleanest in the house too, might need a bit touching up, but I'll let you arrange it anyway you want to."

Harry nodded. Considering he lived in a cupboard underneath the stairs for ten years, anything would be a step up but he had something that he needed to ask Sirius.

"Does this house have a library?" asked Harry as he had learned that quite a few of the pureblood families had libraries and Sirius seemed a bit caught off guard by his question, but answered it nevertheless.

"Yes, right across from the kitchen, but many of the books describe rather dark magic in them," said Sirius before he added. "Not the type that the Ministry brands as dark out of convenience either, true vile magic that has the potential to corrupt the purest person. My ancestors were obsessive collectors of every dark tome they could

get their hands on, it is a virtual gold mine of the worst dark magic there is."

"In other words, the type of magic that Voldemort might use," said Harry slowly.

"Yes, that type," confirmed Sirius with a frown as he was conflicted. One hand, he really was not all that uncomfortable with his godson having access to certain books, but on the other hand he did have to know what he was up against. Even though he denied it, he would be a fool to admit that he was not at least curious and did not sneak a peak at a few of the more forbidden tomes when he was a teenager. "That's not the only books though in the library, there are books on pretty much every branch of magic imaginable. Many books that are long since out of print."

"Yes, well, I'd like to have a look around there, I need to know what I'm up against and perhaps figure out some new ways to defend myself," said Harry.

"Just promise me you will be careful, Harry and I would also advise not to let anyone know that you're even reading about dark magic, people might get the wrong ideas," said Sirius with a nod, he fully trusted Harry, but he had to at the same time maintain the illusion of being a responsible adult.

"I intended to on both account," said Harry, who read enough about the psychology of learning dark magic to understand the distinction between use and abuse. Besides, he needed to learn all he could about the dark arts, not for power, but for the necessity of accomplishing what needed to be done.

Chapter Fifteen: Prefect

The clean up effort at Grimmauld Place was a task to say the least. The house had not even been touched in at least thirteen years, as Kreacher had refused to do anything productive in the house and thus let it fall into ruin. Not to mention there were various dark artifacts that laid around, that neither Sirius nor Remus could identify. They had agreed with Harry's suggest that it might not be a good idea to just simply throw out the dark artifacts, as they could easily fall into the wrong hands. Rather, they would lock them up in an unused closet. Of course, Harry had planned to horde a few of the more interesting looking artifacts for his own use and study. Still, it was agreed that what Dumbledore did not know would not hurt them but they had to move everything of value out of sight within the next week, before the Weasleys were moved into the house. Apparently, Dumbledore had gotten the idea that they were in danger because of Voldemort returned. Given the fact they were the biggest bunch of blood traitors in the Wizarding World and Ginny was Harry's girlfriend, he would have to agree with Dumbledore's brilliant deduction.

He had kept in touch with Ginny, Luna, and Neville as much as he could, but given the fact that he assisted with the clean up effort, the opportunities were far between. Harry needed to horde away as many books as he could before Molly Weasley came here and decided to throw everything out that she thought was dark by her own narrow minded standards.

Yet, in his wildest dreams, Harry would never have imagined that he would have gotten his hands on the object that he had found when he had went through the attic of Number Twelve Grimmauld Place.

"The Locket Horcrux," whispered Harry in awe as he saw a locket with the unmistakable symbol of Salazar Slytherin. He looked at it, according to Voldemort's memories it was in a cave where he visited during a trip with the other children at the orphanage that he grew up in. It was placed in a basin and protected by a rare poison that gave the user hallucinations as it slowly killed them. The basin was charmed that if the potion was simply dumped to the ground instead of drunk, it would magically reappear in a logical quantity, unless of course a password that only two people knew was given. In that case,

the potion would vanish, to allow the locket to be easily accessed. He only could imagine how the locket had gotten here but he looked, Sirius and Remus were several rooms over. "I have to pocket this and go up to destroy it later."

Harry shoved the Horcrux into his pocket. While he would let Remus and Sirius in on the Horcruxes when the time was right, the fact was that given they were so busy, Harry had never had enough time to do so. Still, it was quite lucky that he managed to take some Basilisk venom home in his bag for the holidays. He was quite curious exactly how the locket had moved from where Voldemort brought it over to here, but he was not about to look a gift Horcrux in the mouth.

Harry moved to the side, with the locket in his pocket, careful not to look too suspicious. While it was not completely ready to be Headquarters, there were still Order members popping in on occasion. Harry was very reluctant to trust many of them and decided to keep his distance from them. Especially Moody, who appeared to distrust even his own shadow and would be the most likely person to be suspicious about anything. Still, as long as he played the role of the innocent naïve Gryffindor everyone thought he was, no one would have a reason to suspect that he was up to anything. After all, the mask was removed around his closet friends and he could count on one hand the people that he allowed to see the real Harry Potter and that's the way it was to remain for as long as he could manage.

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Harry entered his room at the night, as he removed the locket from the inside pocket of his robes. The metal was cold and it gave a slightly chilling aura. In an instant, Harry dropped the locket down on the table. Quickly, he shoved the trunk full of books that he borrowed from the Black family library underneath the bed and he looked at the Portkey, where he could easily communicate with Ginny.

"Ginny, are you able to hear me?" asked Harry and after a few seconds paused.

"I managed to slip away, Mum's yelling at Fred and George, I know, big shock, but everyone's on edge when Dumbledore moves us over

to Grimmauld Place, so she's distracted, it's the perfect time for us to talk," answered Ginny's voice over the connection. "Is there something the matter?"

"No nothing, in fact, I found the last thing I thought I would find, one of Voldemort's Horcruxes," replied Harry over the connection and he could hear Ginny gasp in surprise, he could tell that this was one of the last things she expected him to tell her. "Yeah, I know, right here, it was the locket."

"If only it was the cup, that would be nice," muttered Ginny under her breath.

"No that'd be lucky, but we have to work with what we got," said Harry in a resigned voice. He would have been pleased if he had just come across the golden cup, which was entombed in Bellatrix Lestrange's vault in Gringotts and it would take a miracle to have the goblins hand over any treasure, even if the Ministry had told them to. Several times, people in the Ministry had tried to get the fortunes of known Death Eaters during the first rise to power of Voldemort confiscated. The goblins refused to cooperate and the Ministry officials that had went to Gringotts to enforce the orders never returned. It was actually quite thankful for the Ministry that they were occupied with Voldemort, otherwise they would be locked in a conflict with the goblins that would have lead to much bloodshed. By the time Voldemort was gone, the Ministry abandoned the idea to confiscate vaults, as they felt there was no need now.

"True, once you get the locket destroyed, you're have two Horcruxes to go, maybe three," said Ginny.

"Yes, but even with his Horcruxes gone, I don't think Voldemort's going down without a fight," said Harry, as after all, a wounded dog was more dangerous than a healthy one and if his Horcruxes had been taken way, Voldemort would be for all intents and purposes a wounded dog. "I'm going to get this out of the way right now and then I'll see what I can do about the ring. Voldemort really protected it more than his other Horcruxes for some reason."

“Well maybe you’ll find out when you sort through all those memories leftover from the Horcrux,” said Ginny and Harry had to agree. “I’ll talk to you later Harry, Mum’s coming this way, she’s in a bad temper it sounds like.”

“Okay, see you soon Ginny,” answered Harry as he conjured a glass case before he bent down into his bag and removed a vial of basilisk venom from his bag. He dropped the locket into the glass case. He could hear a hiss, almost as if the locket could sense what was going to happen but yet no matter what, it could not prevent what was to come. As he did in the Room of Requirement he placed the vial right on top of the Horcrux, placing a time delayed removal of the anti-dissolving charms, before he sealed the case and equipped it with anti-dissolving charms of his own. He watched as the Horcrux was destroyed by the basilisk venom.

He thought of the Hufflepuff Cup. At one time, he wondered if breaking Bellatrix Lestrange out of Azkaban and somehow forcing her to lead him into her vault might be a probable method, but given the evidence that he got when he dug around the Ministry, he discounted it easily. He got a look at the security records for Azkaban and it seemed as if Bellatrix Lestrange had the highest security detail now that Sirius had escaped from Azkaban. She had a regular guard of Dementors and was described as needed to be regularly sedated because she was extremely dangerous and disruptive. The record had stated that she had tried to murder at least seven of her fellow inmates and had succeeded in offing three. Harry was appalled, he wondered how bad Lestrange would be without the regular presence of Dementors.

It did trouble Harry that the security detail records for Azkaban were so easy to obtain. If Harry was able to get his hands on such confidential information with little trouble, it should be a walk in the park for someone like Lucius Malfoy to do so. Harry knew this was yet another reason why there needed to be change, as he cleared up the remnants of the destroyed Horcrux away. With this one item out of the way, he had just taken one more step down the path to Voldemort’s final defeat

Percy Weasley had just walked into the Burrow with a spring in his step. After the unfortunate incident regarding Crouch and his son, Percy had thought his career in the Ministry was over. He still worked in the Department of Magical Cooperation but considering the entire department was in flux thanks to no one being able to step up straight away to pick up the slack for Mr. Crouch, it was just everyone going through the motions until a successor could be found for the disgraced former head of department.

Yet, just earlier today, Percy had been called for a meeting by the Minister of Magic himself. When Percy walked to the Minister's office he had feared the worst. As he was tied so closely into what had happened with Mr. Crouch, he fully expected to be shown the door. Yet, Fudge had offered him a job as the Junior Assistant to the Minister of Magic. To get such a job straight out of Hogwarts was such a great achievement. According to the Minister, Percy had been highly recommended by several sources, although he decided not to mention who those sources were. Not that it mattered who to Percy, all that mattered was that he had been recommended by the job.

He had entered the house. The other members of his family were huddled around for some reason, Percy had spent most of his time at the Ministry and had only returned late at night, before departing early in the morning, before even his mother had gotten out of bed. Still he was allowed to return home early, so he could inform his family of the news.

"Mother, father, I have news for you both, in fact for you all," stated Percy in a thrilled voice, as his parents looked at him.

"We do too Percy, you haven't been home all week to hear the news but..." said Molly but Arthur, in a rare moment of showing something resembling a backbone, cut his wife off in mid sentence.

"You first Percy, it seems like whatever news you want to tell us is something you're happy about," said Arthur in an even voice as he looked at his third oldest son.

“Well, The Minister called me into his office today...” stated Percy as his parents looked at him. “I thought for sure he was going to release me and I would have to find another job, but much to my surprise he offered me a transfer to another job. I couldn’t really believe it. I’d have to be the youngest person to get such a high position in the Ministry and with the Minister of Magic himself, as his Junior Assistant. He said someone highly recommended me as well, so it wasn’t like it came out of nowhere”

Arthur and Molly sat at each other at a loss for words. Ginny just looked on with a smile, but Ron, Fred, George, Bill, and Charlie each looked like they were thinking the same thing. They had all known that Percy had bungled up big time with the Crouch fiasco and expected that he might be taken down several pegs.

“Percy, as good as that is, don’t you think it’s odd that you’ve gotten a high end job in the Ministry right now,” said Arthur slowly. “After what’s happened lately...”

“I don’t know what you could be talking about Father,” said Percy slowly.

“The Ministry is trying to discredit Dumbledore, because he’s saying that He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named has returned and they don’t want to admit it,” said Molly as if she tried to get Percy to admit reason. “It’s well known we’re in danger and we’re being moved to a safe place by Dumbledore, so his followers can’t easily attack us.”

“What are you trying to say?” asked Percy.

“Percy, we think the Minister is trying to get you to spy on us, to keep an eye on what Dumbledore’s up to,” answered Arthur slowly.

“Does everything have to be about Dumbledore?” demanded Percy, as he proved he was a Weasley by losing his temper slightly. “Maybe I just got the job because the Minister thought I was the best person for the job. Another thing, it’s funny that you’re taking Dumbledore’s word as gospel. The Ministry must have some good evidence that points to You-Know-Who being gone for good.”

“Percy, Harry was there,” offered Bill trying to pacify the situation.

“Ah, yes, but did Harry ever personally say that he went face to face with He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named?” asked Percy as he looked around. “It’s awfully strange that no one but Dumbledore’s spreading the word. I’ve been at Hogwarts for three years with Harry, and he does seem like the type not to let something like this go quietly.”

“Just ask Dumbledore, he said that Harry was there, why would he lie?” asked Molly as she stood up to face Percy before she turned to Ginny. “Ginny, tell Percy, you were there when Dumbledore questioned him.”

“Mum, Harry told Dumbledore that he could not really remember what happened in the Graveyard, only bits and pieces regarding Pettigrew,” replied Ginny as she looked her mother in the eye firmly without blinking. “I was there in the Hospital Wing when Dumbledore asked him and so were others.”

“Exactly, I do wonder how Dumbledore has managed to come to that conclusion myself, perhaps the Ministry should investigate that,” said Percy. “It seems to me that he’s using Harry’s name to gain credibility for his paranoid delusions. I fully support the Ministry in limiting Dumbledore’s power, it’s obvious he’s becoming a danger and I think anyone who is in the league of him should be warned of

“Look Percy, if you’re going to sell us out to the Ministry, then you’re no longer welcomed in this house!” shouted Arthur hotly, as he had lost his temper but Percy just remained there coolly.

“If you want to follow Dumbledore straight to your grave, that’s fine with me, I’ll be sure to come to your funerals,” answered Percy as he looked at his family. “But I’m going to stand by the Ministry, they have the best interests for everyone in mind, which is more than I can say about Dumbledore.”

“So just like that you’re going to betray us for the Ministry!” shouted Ron angrily as he lost his temper.

"Betrayal is such an interesting word coming from you Ronald, given what you and young Miss Granger did last year," answered Percy coolly as he looked at Ron, who obviously was holding back a rant about Harry but given that his mother had shouted at him for eight and a half straight hours after being ungrateful last time, he wisely held it in. His eardrums were still recovering. "If any of you wish to see the error in my way, I will be moving into a flat in London. I'll send on the address in a couple of days once I get settled in but until then, it's good bye."

Percy left without another word.

"Percy, Percy!" shouted Molly who did not know where Percy had the gall to question Dumbledore. She had raised her children to respect Dumbledore, to see that he was a great man, that was never wrong and now it was like Percy had personally slapped her in the face. "Get back here young man! I absolutely forbid you to take this job and to walk out on us!"

Percy continued to walk as if he had never heard his mother. Molly sat at the table and shook madly. How could one of her children have disobeyed her like that? She was at a loss to see how Percy could have been lead astray, she knew she had done nothing wrong when raising them.

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Neville Longbottom sat at his house. He had spent whatever time he could practicing magic, since Harry had let him know that he could get away with it over the summer. He was just careful not to let his grandmother find out what he was doing. Over the past year, he noticed a distinct improvement in his ability to perform magic and his confidence had risen as well. The only thing was that Neville thought would have made it better would have been to have his own wand, as opposed to using his father's old wand. He never mentioned the subject to his grandmother, as he would have gotten a lecture about being ashamed about his father. There were times where Neville almost thought that his grandmother saw Neville as his father's clone, rather than her grandson.

"Neville, a letter just came about you from Hogwarts!" called Augusta Longbottom from the stairs as Neville could hear her footsteps approaching more and more, as she pushed the door open and looked at Neville with a pleased expression on her face. "It's the results for your examinations, it says here you've passed every subject, in fact you've received an Exceeds Expectations on your Potions exam."

"Really, that's great," said Neville, who thought he must have exceeded Snape's expectations every time he did not blow up the cauldron. He would have to tell Harry that his fears about them not doing well on the exams were not founded. While he did not know how Luna or Ginny did, Neville was pleased with his own grades.

"You should be proud of those marks Neville, it just shows you are finally living up to the reputations of your parents," said Augusta.

"Well I had to eventually, Gran," said Neville who privately wished that she had not compared him to his parents, but rather judged him on his own merits. As Harry had told him, the only reputation he should cement would be his own and not be worried about living up to his parents. While it was sad what happened, Neville had long since accepted that they would not be coming back from the torture they suffered. There were times where his grandmother acted like they might and Neville should be ready to make them proud should they come back. In truth, it was even more highly unlikely they would return as more time passed, at least based on what the some of the restricted section books stated about the after-effects of overexposure to the Cruciatus Curse.

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Luna sat in her room in her house. The last year had been a rather interesting one. She had always known that Harry had potential, but it was nice to meet the true Harry Potter, as opposed to the mask. She had been encouraging Ginny for a while to just talk to him and get to know him. After all, it would be foolish to go through life wondering what might have been. Sure enough, Luna was right, as she tended to be often. It was even more fortunate that Harry had shed the dead weight of Ron Weasley and Hermione Granger. Hermione was

troubling, as Luna saw the girl was rather narrow minded and had a distinct view of black and white. Ron was just a hot headed buffoon that would become jealous in the blink of an eye. Those two turning their backs on Harry was honestly the best thing that ever happened to him.

Right now, she was looking through the latest addition of the Quibbler, which painted Dumbledore as secretly being an evil alien overlord that plotted to manipulate everyone in the Wizarding World. Luna was amazed how accurate her father's latest conspiracy theory was. Well, other than the evil alien overlord part, as far as Luna knew anyway. Given everything she had learned over the past year, it would not surprise her at the least.

Still, the last year had been fun, Luna had real friends in Ginny, Neville, and Harry. Thanks to the charm that Harry taught her, she was even able to stop people from stealing her stuff. She suspected they might have learned after getting blasted into a wall the moment they touched her trunk a couple of times. There were still the comments that Luna had to endure, but they were not worth her time. Harry had to endure far worse and it would be silly for her to get upset.

Still, next year and the coming years were going to be interesting, with the revolution that was sure to sweep through the Wizarding World if Harry and Ginny had gotten their way. Luna was pleased that she was on the ground floor for this as for once there would be positive change in the Wizarding World. Many had said so far years but few had been in the position to actually follow through without getting shut down by those who refused to let go of old traditions and practices.

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"So, there's no one who is willing to be the Defense Against the Dark Arts position so far?" inquired Harry as he sat at the table in the kitchen of Number Twelve Grimmauld Place with Remus and Sirius. The Weasleys were due any minute. Harry supposed it might be easy for them to take a Portkey, but perhaps too easy for someone like Dumbledore.

"It's not that anyone's not going to take it, the Ministry have passed laws that said that all newly appointed teachers have to be approved by the Hogwarts Board of Governors," said Sirius.

"After Dumbledore appointed both myself and the fake Moody incident last year, they do have a right to be concerned," said Remus. "Still, the Ministry is playing a very careful game, they made this decision after Dumbledore had been voted off of the Wizengamot and they are looking into every decision he's been a part of closely."

"After sending Harry to the Dursleys, no one could really blame what Fudge did to dilute Dumbledore's power, if Dumbledore wasn't Dumbledore he would have been thrown into Azkaban right away," said Sirius.

"The word around the Ministry from my visits is that a lot of people do think that Dumbledore's too old to be trusted with any power, he's mind is going on in but many more still think that Fudge is making a big deal out of what's happening," remarked Harry, as he knew so far everything was going his way, the Ministry was divided over this issue.

"FILTHY BLOOD TRAITORS, BEFOULING THE ANCIENT AND NOBLE HOUSE OF BLACK!" shouted a voice from the hallway.

"I think the Weasleys are here," remarked Remus calmly and sure enough, eight of the Weasleys moved inside, along with Hermione who had just arrived at the Weasleys to visit Ron, as they looked shaken.

"Sirius Black, what in the bloody hell is that thing in the hallway?" demanded Molly Weasley who looked shaken, as she had rarely encountered someone who could yell louder than her.

"Hello, Molly, nice to see you again too," remarked Sirius calmly, as Ginny sat down next to Harry, with the others crowding around until Kreacher had walked forward. "Kreacher go get more chairs won't you?"

“Yes, Master Sirius,” said Kreacher before he muttered under his breath. “Even if it is for the blood traitors who woke my mistress from her sleep, poor mistress, having these blood traitors in the house, befouling her very memory.”

“And to answer your question, Molly, that was a painting of my dear mother, she tends to yell at anyone who wakes her up, I’d advise not walking next to it too loudly,” answered Sirius.

“Can’t you take it down, though?” asked Bill.

“She has a permanent sticking charm on the back of her, Harry did mention about something called turpentine, but it might need to be adjusted based on the magical properties of the paint or something really technical he tried to explain to me,” said Sirius with a shake of his head.

“Really, turpentine, as the Muggle chemical that removes paint,” said Arthur in an interested tone of voice. “It’s amazing, Muggle paint could be cleared away with a vanishing charm obviously, but magical paint is something entirely different, needs specialized spells, but exactly how does that work? How does the paint vanish?”

“Arthur, that’s enough,” said Molly in a warning voice, not in the mood to deal with her husband’s Muggle obsession habits before she turned to Harry. “How you coping with what happened, Harry?”

“I’m fine, still can’t remember a lot of it, but perhaps that’s for the best,” answered Harry evasively as he could tell Ron and Hermione were giving him suspicious looks, but he just did not acknowledge their presence.

“Perhaps that is for the best, you’re still too young to worry about this anyway,” replied Molly and Harry just bit his lip to refrain from responding. He could see Ginny was having an internal struggle not to have a go at her mother and quickly Harry grabbed her hand from underneath the table. “But I don’t think this is a proper place to talk about such of a thing, time for dinner I think.”

Without another word, Molly turned to prepare the meal.

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“Okay, I believe the Twins should get that large room off to the side, Hermione and Ginny can share that room right across from Harry’s, and Ron, you can move into Harry’s room, it should be easy enough to put another bed in there,” ordered Molly as Arthur was currently in the kitchen with Bill, Charlie, Remus, Sirius, and Mad-Eye Moody, who had just swung by towards the tale end of dinner. They were talking Order business.

Harry and Ginny looked at each other, not too pleased with the suggested sleeping arrangements, before they put the together the plan that they had came up with together.

“Mum, I don’t think it’s a good idea that Hermione and I should share a room, she tried to drug my boyfriend and take advantage of him, I don’t trust her,” said Ginny swiftly and Molly winced, she did remember that, but hoped that Hermione would have learned her lesson. However, it appeared that Ginny had not forgiven Hermione for that. “Given the circumstances, Harry and I should be sharing a room.”

Molly was taken aback from her daughter’s bold suggestion and the twins looked amused. Ron looked like he wanted to protest and Hermione looked absolutely depressed at the thought of Ginny being in a room alone with Harry.

“Absolutely not Ginny, people will talk, there should be enough room to put you and Hermione in separate rooms,” said Molly but Harry just fixed his face into a crestfallen look.

“It’s okay Ginny, I’m sure we’ll manage apart, it won’t be easy, but I guess I’ll just have to suffer like I did for the last couple of weeks,” muttered Harry but it was loud enough where Molly could hear him.

“What do you mean suffer, Harry?” asked Molly in a confused voice.

“Nothing, Mrs. Weasley, really just horrific nightmares about my time at the Dursleys, Ginny seems to be the only one that can comfort me

after them but I'll survive without her I suppose," answered Harry in a despondent voice as Ron clenched his fists. He knew Harry had always played the tortured little orphan act for sympathy but this was taking it to a whole other level. "The nightmares, are really bad, I've just been barely able to get a few hours of sleep a night but I'll survive. It's nothing really, just memories of being trapped in a small dark rat infested moldy cupboard under the stairs, with no idea when I'll be able to get out. Even though Ginny's ability to comfort me is the only thing that works, I'll survive, really."

Molly looked ashamed, she had no idea. The poor boy, she was going to have a chat to Dumbledore about sending the boy to live with the Dursleys, it had obviously traumatized him. Despite the fact that she knew Harry was not going to do anything unacceptable with Ginny, she did not trust her daughter to do the same. She once foolishly wrote in an enchanted diary to the teenage self of He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named. Still, she could not let Harry suffer with these nightmares, even if her daughter was thought of as a scarlet woman.

"Okay, fine, you can share the room but it will be in separate beds and I better not catch you two doing anything," said Molly sternly and both Harry and Ginny nodded, there were charms that would warn them of Molly's arrival or anything else for that matter. "Ron, you can sleep with the Twins and Hermione you can have the smallest room, right at the end of the hallway."

Ron looked alarmed at the prospect of having to share a room with Fred and George, who broke into identical grins. He had a feeling that he had a few weeks as an unwilling test subject for their inventions ahead of them. Still one thing was for certain, Ron would like to get his hands on the person that gave Fred and George their funding.

"C'mon Ginny, I need some help for getting our room ready so we can move another bed in there for tonight," answered Harry as they gripped hands before they walked into the room. The minute the door shut behind them, Harry waved his wand. In a matter of seconds, Harry's bed was duplicated. While it was mostly for show, he still tried to make it so Ginny had a comfortable time just in case she had to sleep in it on certain occasions to maintain the illusion for Molly. Once that was done, Harry pulled Ginny forward into a kiss that she

returned, their tongues moved into each other's mouths, their fingers exploring each others bodies. Before they could get too involved, Ginny slowly pulled away from Harry.

"The advanced warning charms are in place, right?" asked Ginny, who knew Harry would be prepared for anything, but still wanted to be on the safe side.

"Naturally Ginny, I had to put them around my room to warn if people approached anyone, wouldn't want to have someone like Moody catch me reading a dark arts book," said Harry and Ginny would have to agree.

"I can't believe Mum bought all of that," said Ginny as she shook her head.

"Well, not all of it was true, after that one night we spent in the Room of Requirement together, I've had trouble sleeping," said Harry.

"Really, me too," said Ginny in a surprised voice.

"I guess we've grown accustomed to being with each other," suggested Harry.

"After one night?" asked Ginny.

"Sometime's that's all it takes," said Harry with a smile, before they resumed their activities for at least the next hour, before they drifted off to sleep, once again mostly untroubled. While Harry had informed Ginny of a bit of what he done, there was still much he had to let her in on and would do so the next day.

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A couple of days later, Ginny and Harry sat reading the books that Harry had managed to get his hands on. True enough, once Molly had gotten cleaning, she had thrown out most of anything that she deemed dark. It was quite fortunate that many of the really dangerous things and the really good books were found before she had arrived. With Ginny's help, he managed to get a few more books out before

Molly had them purged. While it was far from all of the books, Harry and Ginny together managed to save at least a good hundred or so, which just barely put a dent in the library.

At this point, Harry was reading a book that described the three Unforgiveable Curses in very vivid and graphic detail, along with the theories about how they were developed. There was a theory that stood out of him, that the Killing Curse did not mean instant death, although it was rather quick. Rather it was a super accelerated coma curse that had the side effect of causing all the internal organs to fail simultaneously within less than thirty seconds. On that note, the author believed that the spell could be blocked, but no one had been known to develop a counter curse powerful enough to block it. Harry had wondered if that's what his mother was up to before she died.

The monitoring charm had kicked in which caused Harry and Ginny to sit up, as there was an Order of the Phoenix meeting happening right now. They remained quiet.

"My sources indicate there were some shady figures lurking around the entrance to the Department of Mysteries," answered Moody. "The Ministry seems to think it's a false alarm..."

"They're after it," said Snape quietly. "The Dark Lord said about as much."

"After what?" asked a voice that neither of them recognized.

"That is not important right now, but the fact we need to make sure we guard the Department of Mysteries for intruders, even if that is not what Voldemort is after," said Dumbledore gravely. "There are many treasures inside the Department of Mysteries, any of which that Voldemort can put to a horrible use."

"If it's what I think it is why don't we just take Harry in there at night when no one is there and have him remove it from the shelf, smash it into pieces, and replace it with a fake copy, that way we won't have to waste our time guarding a stupid glass orb," suggested Sirius.

“Excellent idea, Sirius,” muttered Ginny under her breath and Harry nodded. He had not given it much thought anyway, he just knew he would have to deal with Voldemort anyway no matter what was foretold. Still, he knew it would enrage Voldemort if he thought he had gotten his hands on the prophecy and it turned out to be a fake.

“Now Sirius, we shouldn’t put Harry in danger,” said Molly roughly.

“Well if we’re not putting him in danger, why don’t we tell him the Prophecy, so Voldemort doesn’t use it as a bargaining chip to lure him into danger,” said Sirius who knew Harry knew, but obviously was playing up the role that Dumbledore had expected him to.

There was a pause of several mutterings of “what prophecy” and “what does this have to do with Potter”.

“Long story short, it’s a prophecy that holds the key to defeating Voldemort and Harry’s involved,” said Dumbledore evasively. “Just all you need to know is that we need to protect the Department of Mysteries at all costs.”

“Yes, but what about telling Harry about the reason why a homicidal madman is after him?” demanded Sirius forcefully.

“Sirius, Harry will know when the time is right, but the time is far from right,” said Dumbledore and Harry and Ginny just sighed from the room, as they heard these words come over the transmission. They were not surprised, Dumbledore never bothered to tell anyone anything until his hand was forced. “We will discuss who will guard the Department of Mysteries at what time, but right now we have other business to attend to. The situation regarding the goblins of course.”

“Well they’re not really fond of any human being lately, so that could be a good thing I suppose, while they’re not talking to us, at least they’re not talking to You-Know-Who,” answered Bill calmly.

“What’s the progress about getting them to agree to confiscate known Death Eater vaults?” asked one of the Order members.

“As I said last time, I don’t think it’s as good as idea, while it would strain You-Know-Who’s potential resources, the fact remains that goblins don’t like getting involved in human conflict,” said Bill. “If we press the issue too much, they might join up with You-Know-Who out of spite.”

“Point well taken, Bill, do try and see what you can do to sway the goblins towards our side, but be discreet about it, as Voldemort might very well have goblins who sympathize with him to an extent,” said Dumbledore. “Now, Charlie, what can you tell me about your efforts overseas in gaining help?”

“Slow, I’ve got a few people listening, but not to the extent that they’re willing to do much unless You-Know-Who threatens their countries,” said Charlie. “I’ll see what I can do when I return to Romania tomorrow, but people are sticking their heads in the sand even more over there more so than the Ministry over here.”

“Even if we get a few people to listening, it could be well enough to shift the balance towards our side,” said Dumbledore. “Now Remus what have you found out about the werewolves?”

“Greyback’s active once again, after several years underground,” said Remus. “Given what Umbridge did by passing through all that new legislation, he has a greater argument than ever before and more werewolves may join Voldemort.”

“Yes, but should we really worry that much about werewolves?” asked a member of the order. “Other than the full moon, every other day of the month, it really depends on what type of wizard they are that will determine how powerful they are.”

“The Dark Lord was working on a way to force the transformation at will and have the werewolves under his control before he fell, we would be fools not to assume he would do so again,” said Snape casually. “There is a reason why these filthy creatures should be contained and perhaps eliminated at all costs. They could be a danger to anyone who wanders or is misdirected into their path.”

“Mind yourself Snape,” growled Sirius angrily as Harry and Ginny also clenched their fists, they knew exactly what Snape was referring to. Harry was not too fond of Snape to begin with given what he learned through Voldemort’s memories, not only what the man was capable but what he asked Voldemort to do. Arrogant enough to believe she would be with him, after Snape had directed Voldemort into killing her husband and son. It made Harry want to boil Snape alive in his own cauldron.

“And I will relay Hagrid’s latest message, it says that he is getting close to the giant’s camp, he should be there in a number of weeks, but he’s being followed and just barely managed to get this message out,” said Dumbledore and Harry almost smacked himself. Hagrid could not hurt a fly but being subtle was not one of his strong points. “Now, the security schedule for monitoring duties for the Department of Mysteries...”

Ginny handed Harry a piece of parchment, a quill, and some ink, which allowed him to scribble down the security schedule as Dumbledore relayed it unknowingly to him. As he studied the parchment, he saw one particular person on security detail that would allow him to get into the Department of Mysteries and swap glass orbs. Given the time was at three o’clock in the morning made it even better.

Harry quickly turned off the connection when he heard Molly Weasley yell at Fred and George for spying on the meeting by using extendable ears. He had no desire to have his ear drums blown out today, but made a mental not to remember to share the meetings with Luna and Neville when they returned to Hogwarts.

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Hermione snuck into her room with an armful of books that she pilfered from the Black library during the clean up. Considering the fact that there was so much stuff that was thrown out, she doubted very much that a few books would be missed. They appeared to be of interest, detailing powerful magic that could be used to influence minds and harm enemies. While both Harry and Ginny were more powerful than her now, Hermione refused to be denied. She would reclaim her

title as the smartest person of her generation along with reclaiming Harry. If she had to learn a little dark magic, than it was for Harry's own good. She refused to believe how he could have been happy with Ginny, when Harry could have had her. In Hermione's mind, Harry was miserable but he did not know it but she would correct the problem sooner or later.

She flipped open a page that saw a very graphic depiction of an extremely powerful curse. A smile appeared on Hermione's face, when she visualized herself performing that particular spell on Ginny. Harry would not even look at her when she was mangled to that extent or any other boy for that matter. It would take some practice to be able to pull it off, but Hermione had patience. That was proven by the fact she had not killed Ron yet. Once she got Ginny alone, then she would make that treacherous bitch pay.

"Hermione?" asked a voice and Hermione quickly shoved the books under her bed. She would have a lot of explanations to give if someone had caught her with these books.

"Yes, I'm here, come in," said Hermione as the door was pushed open and much to her disappointment, it was Ron. "Yes, Ron, what is it?"

"Mum wants your help, the doxies in the living room are out of control," said Ron.

"Tell her I'll be down in a couple of minutes," answered Hermione and Ron nodded, before he walked off. Hermione sighed, it was tough that Ron was the only person that would talk to her cordially. Still she walked off to help Ron's mother, as she envisioned the day that she would be on the other end of a kiss from Harry as opposed to Ginny.

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In the Department of Mysteries, Harry stepped inside, covered in his Invisibility Cloak as he saw a figure stagger around in a half hearted attempt to guard the door. The man was called Mundungus Fletcher or Dung for short. "Dung" pretty much accurately described his abilities to properly guard a door. Quickly, Harry had shot a spell in

the distance. Dung was distracted by that and moved off to check the disturbance. Harry slipped inside the Department of Mysteries and walked forward.

He moved through each door instinctively. While he was not doing it consciously, he seemed to know where to go. Perhaps Voldemort had been this way before? Sure enough, he had reached rows and rows of glass orbs.

"This has to be the place," muttered Harry as he moved forward and he came across a glass orb, clearly labeled where anyone with half of a brain could have figured out what it truthfully was. Quickly, he swapped the real glass orb with a fake one with a humorous message from him just in case Voldemort had gotten his hands on the prophecy. Given the fact that only him and Voldemort could even get close enough to touch this spot on the shelf, much less the orb, he was safe. Quickly he pocketed the prophecy. "Okay, Ginny, I'm ready."

"Stand by Harry, I'm retrieving you," said Ginny's sleepy voice and sure enough, Harry was pulled out of the Department of Mysteries, with the real prophecy and no one would be any wiser, until Voldemort had taken the fake bait.

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A couple of days before they were due to return to Hogwarts, everyone sat around the table for breakfast at Number Twelve Grimmauld Place. There was a concern as the letters from Hogwarts had not arrived, especially from Hermione who wanted to get a jump on her studies for the year because it was O.W.L. year. Harry and Ginny both knew the reason why the letters had taken so long to get here.

The doors burst open and the imposing figure of Severus Snape had entered the kitchen. His cloak swished behind him as he stalked his way towards the table and dropped a stack of letters on the table.

"Your Hogwarts letters," remarked Snape swiftly, annoyed that he had to play post owl for Dumbledore and he quickly turned and

walked off as quickly as he came. Molly opened her mouth to ask Snape to stay for breakfast but the look on her face made her think better of it. Letters were passed around.

“Bloody hell!” shouted Ginny as a silvery object had dropped out of her envelope and her eyes widened when she realized what it was. A similar object had slid out of Harry’s envelope as well.

“Ginny that’s not language befitting of...a young lady,” said Molly trailing off when she saw what Ginny had in her hand. “Is that a prefect badge?”

“No it can’t be,” muttered George in a mock horrified voice.

“We thought we taught her well, that she would take up the good fight after we left Hogwarts,” added Fred.

“Yet, she’s one of them now,” continued George who looked mortified.

“And a year early as well,” said Fred.

“That’s not the worst part, she has real power over us now,” said George.

“Merlin help us all,” wailed Fred.

“Enough you two,” said Molly. “Ginny, there must be some kind of mistake, a prefect badge in your fourth year.”

“No it says that since the only viable candidate in the fifth year was disqualified due to her blatant abuse of the school rules...” stated Ginny and here she caught Hermione’s eye who was absolutely seething at this news. If anyone should have gotten a prefect badge a year early, it should have been her. “And the other two fifth year Gryffindor girls are not what we feel to be adequate prefect material, we have deferred to you, the most able fourth year girl in your house. It’s not without precedent either, but it’s only the third time in Hogwarts history that’s happened.”

"Really Ginny, that's great, I'm so proud of you!" gushed Molly happily. Ginny felt sickened at the amount of pride that her mother showed to her. She had only reacted coolly at most towards her since the Chamber of Secrets and now she had done an about face. Slowly, Molly had turned to Ron. "Well, Ron what about you?"

"I didn't get a prefect badge," said Ron who was quite relieved and Molly looked away at him, as if she could not stand to look at Ron.

"I can't really believe this, a prefect, I don't know what to say," said Ginny.

"Now Ginny, just because you're not an insufferable know-it-all bookworm who arrogantly flaunts all of her knowledge to make others look stupid, doesn't mean you're not perfect material to be a prefect," said Harry and Ginny responded with a smile. "You're smart enough and have the type of qualities that can make a great leader."

"Harry, is there something you'd like to show us?" asked Sirius who had seen the badge before Harry had hidden it under the table.

"Something like this maybe, Sirius," said Harry as he showed his prefect badge.

"Bullshit, why does he get to be a prefect, doesn't he already have enough?" snapped Ron angrily. While he did not want to be a prefect, Harry should not have been either. His ego was already inflated enough. "Of course, the precious Boy-Who-Lived gets everything he wants..."

"Ronald, be quiet," said Molly in a dangerous voice as Ron gulped. "Really Harry that's great, if your parents were alive, they would be proud of you."

"Of course they would be proud of you no matter what whether or not you did not get a prefect badge," amended Sirius as he narrowed his eyes at Molly.

"I think I'm done here," said Harry quickly.

"Me too," answered Ginny catching on. "Mum, how about we get a start on finishing the cleaning the living room for you, while you take our shopping lists to Diagon Alley?"

"You don't have to clean the living room, I think you've earned the day off from cleaning," said Molly, who was unaware that Harry and Ginny had not cleaned up one bit of the house that she had assigned them. Every time there was cleaning to be done, Harry just called on Dobby, who acted like it was his birthday and Christmas present all wrapped up into one when Harry asked him to do so. That allowed them to sneak off and alternate between studying the dark art texts that Harry had grabbed, along with occasionally engaging in more pleasurable activities while everyone else was off cleaning.

"If you say so Mum, come on Harry, we do have a bit of rearranging of our trunks to do before we go back to Hogwarts," said Ginny with an aside wink when no one else was looking.

"Right, Ginny, thanks for reminding me," answered Harry, as he heard Molly planning a party to celebrate Harry and Ginny becoming prefects in the evening, but they left hand in hand.

Hermione sat at the table, wondering if her life could get any worse. Ginny had stolen both Harry and her rightful position as fifth year prefect, despite being only a fourth year. No one but Ron would willingly talk to her.

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Harry and Ginny made their way upstairs.

"Okay Harry, just how did you manage it?" asked Ginny as she looked into Harry's eyes who briefly maintained a look of innocence before he folded.

"First of all Ginny, you earned that prefect badge, but I might have done some things to open a few people's eyes," said Harry with a grin. "Like I said back in the kitchen, you're smart enough, smarter than Granger could ever hope to be and you didn't need to memorize the entire library to do so either."

"You're right, I just shocked," said Ginny with a nod. "Congratulations on becoming prefect as well, if anyone deserves to be one it would be you and it brings us one step closer to what we want."

"Thanks Ginny and for the record, I have to admit the Board of Governors were a bit reluctant to give a prefect position to someone a year younger than they normally started out, saying that they wanted someone who could be a strong leader, not a mere figurehead like they were when Dumbledore chose them, to do the work teachers didn't want to dirty their hands with," said Harry and Ginny nodded. "Still, they really wanted me to be the boy's prefect and I refused to accept it, unless you were given the girl's prefect position for the fifth year. Given that I was the only candidate that fit their standards and the Minister leaned hard on them to give me the position, they had no choice but give you the spot. I didn't want to have any position of power, unless you had the same amount of power."

"Thank you Harry, it really means a lot to me," said Ginny.

"By the way, I know who the new Defense Against the Dark Arts Teacher is, I just found out when I visited the Ministry yesterday," answered Harry. "For the record, I hate this person but the fact is a lot of other people will hate her too. Given what we talked about last year, Fudge could have forced no better person on us."

Ginny nodded, she could not be happier. Dumbledore's influence through the Ministry dwindled by the day, having lost most of his major positions of power. Only the post as Hogwarts Headmaster remained and if Harry was right, it might be months at most before he lost that as well.

"Mum sounded like she's planning a party for us getting to be prefects tonight, but how about we have a private celebration after that's over?" asked Ginny.

"What do you have in mind?" responded Harry as he raised an eyebrow.

"I think I can give you a little hint," said Ginny playfully, as she leaned forward and their lips met. Somehow, Harry found himself backed against the wall, as Ginny's body was pressed tightly against his, as they kissed, her fingers on her left hand twirling his hair and her right hand starting on his side, before it travelled slowly down, the tips of her fingers brushing against waistband of his pants before she slowly backed away from him with a smile. "You're going to have to wait until tonight to see what happens next."

"Fair enough Ginny, but be ready to receive as well as give tonight," responded Harry.

"I wouldn't have it any other way, Harry," responded Ginny with a smile as licked a bit of maple syrup off of her fingers that had remained there from Breakfast, as she turned, her backside brushing up against Harry slowly as she walked down the hallway. Harry followed. Despite what he looked forward to tonight, the fact remained there were still a few things that they had to get in order before they made their way back to Hogwarts. Unfortunately, it appeared that they would have to worry about taking care of the ring Horcrux until the Christmas holidays.

Chapter Sixteen: Umbridge:

It seemed like no matter how early someone got up before the first day of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, there was always a rush to get everyone ready. Especially when certain members of the house hold decided that it would be a good idea to wait until the morning they were due to leave for school. Despite the fact that it did not work the last four years, there was always the person that thought five would be their lucky number and they were wrong.

“RONALD WEASLEY!” shouted Molly up the stairs, as the Fred, George, and Hermione had just hauled their trunks at the bottom of the stairs. Ginny and Harry already had Dobby take along the trunks that contained the books that Harry managed to rescue from the Black Family library, along with a few items, while they took their other trunks to Hogwarts. It would not have mattered anyway what they did, as Molly had a short temper directed only on Ron. “Get down the stairs now, you should have been packed by now, I told you to start packing last night, and you’ve been up there for two hours.”

‘I’m coming Mum, just five more minutes!’ called Ron from the bedroom.

“That’s what you said fifteen minutes ago Ronald, now you better be down here this time in the next five minutes or you’re not going to Hogwarts this year, the guard for Harry is coming then and Moody wants to leave right away,” said Molly forcefully.

Harry and Ginny exchanged a look. While they could not exactly hear it, they could just about imagine Ron muttering something about Harry getting special treatment. At exactly four and a half minutes later, Ron came down the stairs in a bad temper, with a trunk that looked to be just barely shut. Hermione just looked at him, rolling her eyes at him. Just as Ron had just barely had a chance to catch his breath the door opened, to reveal Mad-Eye Moody along with another six members of the Order of the Phoenix.

“Everyone ready!” shouted Moody gruffly as his magical eye spun around and he turned over to the Order of the Phoenix members.

“You all have your orders, I’ll go with the luggage and Granger, you will come with me where I can keep an eye on you.”

Hermione just obeyed quickly. Moody had always cast her suspicious looks and she was almost afraid to make a move in his presence. Obviously, he heard about when she tried to persuade Harry with the love potion. After that one isolated incident, Moody had always kept both eyes on Hermione, when she was in her presence. She was ushered out, careful not to make Moody suspicious or even more suspicious than he was so he would search her trunk.

Harry watched Moody leave. It was too bad that he was a Dumbledore supporter through and through, that man did have style. He walked off with Ginny, as a team of three Order members followed them closely, along with Sirius. The other team members went with Fred, George, and Ron, with Molly following them. They both took separate paths to King Cross. Harry and Ginny walked quietly and privately agreed that could defend themselves better than the three Order members that Dumbledore had assigned to be there guard. They looked inattentive and a couple of well placed curses might have been likely to finish them off. At the very least, Sirius was with them, that eased their concerns slightly. The few members of the Order of the Phoenix that had the ability to fight in a real battle were full time Aurors at the Ministry of Magic, so they had to work a real job.

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Ginny and Harry made their way onto the Hogwarts Express. Ten minutes after the train had left King’s Cross Station, they were to attend a meeting with the other new Hogwarts prefects. Early in the morning, they had sent Luna and Neville both a message through the portkeys, telling them they would find them after the prefect meeting concluded. The compartment was just next to the front of the train, right where the conductor was.

“Well, if it isn’t Potter and his blood traitor whore,” drawled a voice and Harry knew it had gotten slightly more foul in here, as he was face to face with Draco Malfoy, who was more smug than usual, perhaps owing to the new shiny prefect badge on his chest. He

looked like a pompous pigeon as he puffed his chest out. "What are you doing here Weasley, this compartment is for prefects only?"

"Well considering that's what I am, I belong here," said Ginny with a smile. "I bet your father had to spend a lot of time on his knees to get you that badge."

"Mind yourself, blood traitor, you won't have that smug attitude for much longer, not even Dumbledore won't be able to protect you all for long," bragged Draco. "Soon, all the Mudbloods, blood traitors, and half bloods will kneel down at the feet of the Dark Lord where they belong. This time Potter here won't get lucky, he will pay for disrespecting the Dark Lord, he will fall, and his Mummy won't be able to save him this time."

"Are you done yet?" asked Harry in a bored voice and Draco seemed very annoyed that he had not gotten under Harry's skin. The Boy-Who-Lived was no fun anymore, but at least he could torment the Mudblood for losing both Potter and her prefect position to Ginny Weasley. He bent down, so only him, Draco, and Ginny could hear what he was saying. "Just a little advice, man to pompous nitwit, if you're trying to gain Voldemort's favor, I wouldn't broadcast what he's trying to keep his little grand return quiet. Of course, there's also the small matter that the last time we met, I was still standing by the time I left. He was not. If it was not for a technicality, Voldemort would have the shortest return to power in history."

Draco was not too happy. How dare that filthy half blood tell lies? How dare he say he could have easily killed Voldemort? It was disgusting. His father would certainly hear about this, Potter had to be put into his place and soon. If there was anything that Draco could not stand, was an arrogant egotistical wizard with an overinflated opinion of his own magical ability. All he could do right now was stalk off in a sulky manner, as the Head Girl and Head Boy chatted, no doubt going over a few last minute things before they addressed the new prefects.

"Amusing that you left Malfoy at a loss at words with your cutting wit," said a fifth year girl with dark hair and blue eyes, with a smirk as she looked at Harry and Ginny with a calculating expression. "Of course, I

thought you Gryffindors resorted in hexing people to settle your arguments but I guess that belief is misplaced as the common one that all Slytherin's are evil. Cunning and devious yes, willing to sell out our own mothers for a few galleons if the situation called for it but not evil. I can't even remember the last time I kicked a puppy myself."

The girl snickered at her own joke and Harry and Ginny looked at each other in astonishment.

"Sorry, if I seem to be a little mental, you would be too if you had to share a room with Pansy Parkinson for four years," answered the girl as she looked at Harry and Ginny. "You have no idea who I am, do you Potter?"

"No, sorry, but if you're in Slytherin and I don't know, that must be a good thing," responded Harry and the girl just sighed.

"Of course, the fact I've been in Potions with you every week for the past four years, I suppose I better tell you, I'm Daphne Greengrass, fifth year Slytherin and one of your fellow fifth year prefect," said Daphne with a mocking bow. "The great Harry Potter, it's an honor to meet you, even though I have been in the same class with you for the past four years, but still, it's the thought that counts."

Harry had remembered the name Greengrass now. If he remembered correctly Daphne's father was a member of the Hogwarts Board of Governors.

"Greengrass, don't you have a sister named Astoria, in my year?" asked Ginny.

"Yes, although I'll go out of my way to deny it if you say we're related to anyone else," said Daphne before she lowered her voice. "She has this little problem that is kind of disturbing. She thinks that Draco Malfoy is cute, it's rather disturbing how infatuated she is with him. She sleeps with a lock of his hair that she stole under her pillow."

"Wait a minute, Draco Malfoy, are we talking about the same Draco Malfoy that's in our year at Hogwarts?" asked Harry.

"Thankfully there's only one, Draco Malfoy," said Daphne with a slight shudder at the thought of there being two people like Malfoy and that thought repulsed both Harry and Ginny as well. Still the fact that anyone would be obsessed with Malfoy was even more nightmare inducing. "I'm really surprised I got the spot as prefect anyway. I thought Parkinson had it locked up and Snape would have given it to her."

"Ah but the teachers or Dumbledore have been stripped of the power to grant prefect powers," said Harry and Daphne looked at him in surprise. "Now it's down to the Board of Governors, they look at grades, discipline records, and perhaps even a bit of influential families. Of course, they want people who can actually carry the weight of being prefects, not just pick up the slack from the teachers."

"A rare intelligent move from the Board of Governors will wonders never cease," said Daphne as she shook her head. She had heard her father complain about how they stumbled around, incapable of making even the simplest of decisions and that they allowed Dumbledore too much power in running the school. "Now the real question is how did you find out about this Potter, when it didn't even make it to the Daily Prophet?"

"Now, do you really expect Harry to tell his secrets to a Slytherin?" asked Ginny but she had a smile on her face.

"A year ago, maybe, but not now, there's something off about you, Potter, something different," said Daphne. "If I didn't know anybody, the Harry Potter attending Hogwarts the last few years was a decoy and the real one just showed up last year in time for the Triwizard Tournament. People in Slytherin are wondering. Not many, but a fair few, most of them are too arrogant to believe that a Gryffindor could do anything cunning. Still, people are talking."

"Yes, but people in Gryffindor aren't," responded Harry casually, as if it was just a passing comment.

"And that may be their mistake in the future," muttered Daphne and Harry just adopted an innocent look as if he did not know what she was talking about. "And the fake innocent thing won't work on a

Slytherin, Potter. At least a true Slytherin anyway. Salazar Slytherin himself perfected that look.”

“Now Daphne, are you over here pestering poor, innocent Harry?” asked Susan Bones as she walked over to the group. It seemed the conversation between the Head Boy and the Head Girl was going a bit long and considering the new responsibilities that were passed by the Board of Governors.

“I’m pestering him but the fact that he’s poor or innocent would be a boldface lie,” said Daphne as she looked at Susan.

“Hello Susan, how was your summer?” asked Harry.

“So he remembers your name, has Slytherin really fallen so far that Hufflepuffs rank higher on the scale of importance for saviors against dark lords,” said Daphne in an overly dramatic way that made Harry doubt very much that she was being serious. “It’s all Malfoy’s fault, the pompous pretentious git and his followers are taking the Slytherin House straight into the toilet.”

“Don’t mind Daphne, she tends to have a bit of the flare for the dramatics and a slight ego problem,” said Susan.

“It’s not really a problem, more like a survival instinct,” said Daphne. “Okay maybe it is a bit of a problem, but it’s not as bad as some Slytherins who’s names I won’t mention.”

“Is she always like this?” asked Ginny.

“Normally, she’s a bit worse, but don’t let her fool you, the drama queen act is just a front to fool people into not taking her seriously,” responded Susan with a shrug. “It’s a Slytherin thing, its better off if you don’t think about it too much.”

“I tend not to,” said Harry as Ginny snickered.

“Anyway Harry, I suppose I better pass on a message from my Auntie to you,” said Susan and Harry straightened up with interest, as he wondered what Amelia Bones had to say to him. “She says she’s

wondering when you would officially take your seat in the Wizengamot.”

“I thought I told her when the time was right,” said Harry with a frown.

“I know, she’s just anxious with everything that’s going on, she really thought you would be ready to take your seat by now,” said Susan.

“Well, there has been a lot on my mind lately, but if I don’t see her soon, pass along the message and tell her not to worry, I think I should be able to take my spot within the next year without too many problems,” said Harry thoughtfully. “I need to learn a bit more about the Ministry before I make an informed decision about what I need to do.”

“Okay I relay the message to her, if I’m able to write to her,” said Susan with a frown. If she had found out she had a seat on the Wizengamot, she would have jumped on it immediately. Of course, she would not get her spot until her Aunt Amelia retired.

“All prefects over here!” shouted the Head Girl in a commanding voice and all eight fifth year prefects made their way over. Other than Susan, Daphne, and Malfoy, Harry got a good look at the other three prefects. He recognized the other Hufflepuff prefect, Ernie MacMillan, who had told Harry in an attempt to save his skin when he believed that he was the heir of Slytherin, that his blood could be traced back through nine generations of pureblood witches and warlocks. Still, his father was on the Hogwarts Board of Governors and he had another couple family members in important positions in the Ministry.

He then turned his attention to two Ravenclaw prefects. Anthony Goldstein had an uncle on the Hogwarts Board of Governors, along with his father who had a seat on the Wizengamot. The female Ravenclaw prefect, Padma Patil’s father was also on the Hogwarts Board of Governors. Harry suspected it was just a strange coincidence that so many people who were related to members of the Board.

“First of all let us congratulate you on earning the position of prefects, it shows you are considered to be true leaders within your

perspective houses,” said the Head Boy as he looked around. “However congratulations will only go so far, as this year now more than ever, being a prefect is more than having a shiny badge and patrolling the halls after curfew. Much more than that.”

“Indeed, it allows you to be a step above your peers and you also have the responsibility to maintain peace within your respective houses,” said the Head Girl as she looked around to the eight new prefects who were in eagerly anticipating their next word. “You are allowed to take points off within reason. This is unlimited within your own house but only fifty points per week on the other three houses combined. These must be used responsibly, any hint that you have abused your power and you may lose these privileges.”

“In addition you will be allowed to give detentions, once again within reason and must defer the suggestion to the offending students Head of House,” said the Head Boy with a nod. “Once again, it is a privilege that we expect the prefects to utilize in a responsible manner.”

“In addition to those responsibilities, the Ministry of Magic has requested that the prefects keep a closer eye on the students, as recent changes in the Wizarding landscape has made the need to crack down on anti-Ministry propaganda,” said the Head Girl and here she seemed to be relaying this message only very half-heartedly. “While we value the right to have an opinion, there are times where these opinions may be disruptive. Certain rumors being spread have caused a divide within the Wizarding World and the Ministry has wished to squash these corrosive rumors before they divide us any more. Any attempts at inciting rebellion should be brought to our attention immediately and we will make sure they are dealt with through the proper channels.”

“Also, there is an attempt to monitor the mail for any dangerous or disruptive influence, but this is being fought by certain individuals,” added the Head Boy. “Should this get through, we will hold a meeting where we will have to go through what needs to be done to effectively police the mail that comes to and from Hogwarts.”

“And this goes without saying, but the first year students are going to need a few heads up as they learn their way around Hogwarts, I’m

sure you can all remember how overwhelming everything was during your first week here,” commented the Head Girl as Harry did in fact remember that nightmare, despite the fact that he wished his hardest to forget anything before his fourth year. He was such a naïve little child then. “So if you see any first year, no matter what house, that appears lost, it is your responsibility as prefects to help point him or her in the right direction.”

The prefects all nodded, except Draco who sneered. He obviously expected to enjoy the power of becoming a prefect which in his mind did not include keeping an eye for first year students. Harry thought he was being short sighted, after all, who knew where an act of kindness would come in handy in the future. After all, he did free Dobby and now he had an overexcited house elf who would be willing to do anything Harry asked him without question. The look on Ginny’s face indicated that she was pretty much on the same wavelength with her thoughts.

“And with that in mind, just two more things, we have prepared a schedule for you to patrol the train for any trouble and also this Saturday, we will have an all prefect meeting with not only this year, but the sixth and seventh year prefects,” added the Head Girl. “Now, for the first patrol...”

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“Sorry it took us so long, the prefect meeting ran a bit longer than we expected,” said Harry as he entered the compartment along with Ginny, where Neville and Luna sat awaiting them.

“Yes, that is the trouble with meetings, they never start on time or end on time,” responded Luna calmly.

“We have second watch in about an hour, that should give us plenty of time to let you in on what we learned,” said Ginny as she helped Harry place a few anti-eavesdropping charms around the compartment.

“Given the rumors that have been going around the Daily Prophet, I’d imagine there’s a lot,” said Neville. “Both the incident with the final

task and the fake Moody, the Ministry's not too happy about Dumbledore's performance."

"Yes, no kidding, the Board of Governors have taken a greater role, for what that's worth," answered Harry. "With the new Defense Against the Dark Arts Teacher and the fact they've basically asked us prefects to crack down on anyone who says anything against the Ministry, there are going to be a lot of unhappy people. They're going to need someone to turn to for help and Dumbledore won't be in the position to do it anymore."

"Voldemort is a possibility though," argued Luna.

"He always is, some people might turn to him, but I feel that most of the people that I am looking for have had family members that were killed by him the first time around, few of them if any would turn to Voldemort," said Harry. "I find it disturbing that everything I thought was going to happen if Fudge had reason to believe Dumbledore was against him is happening."

"That just shows your lack of faith towards the Ministry is justified," replied Ginny. "So all of the prefects that are chosen for this year..."

"Show potential, with the obvious exception, if I can convince them to take the necessary route," said Harry. "None of them seem like the type to take Dumbledore's side. That seems to be a mostly Gryffindor thing the more I think of it."

"I think it is actually, you think that Dumbledore walks on water, until you step outside the house," said Neville with a nod.

"As a Ravenclaw, I can say that you're right, we're either neutral towards Dumbledore and fair few of us do wonder exactly how he can be as flawless as people think he is," said Luna. "Justified as well, given what happened with Harry and the role he played with the Secret Keeper. You just wonder what other secrets he's keeping under his hat."

"I think that's something we all wonder," responded Neville with a nod, as the four friends launched into talking about their summers, killing

time until Harry and Ginny were due to make their prefect rounds around the train.

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Several hours later, after the opening feast had concluded, the Great Hall was buzzing as Harry and Ginny made their way to the table. On the train they had to stop a pair of fourth year Slytherins from harassing a first year Muggleborn girl. As much as Harry wanted to teach them a lesson with his wand, he had to remain objective and neutral. Ginny told the Slytherins to clear off while threatening with detention even though they both knew that Snape would never sign off on their request for detention. He would have allowed his Slytherins get away with murder.

Dumbledore had begun to give his usual speech after the students were sorted, that Harry only paid half attention from. It was the usual run of the mill speech, about try outs for Quidditch, about not going near the Forbidden Forest, and the list of items that were banned from the hallways of Hogwarts. Also, a woman named Professor Grubbly-Plank would be replacing Hagrid, because he was unavailable but Harry and Ginny knew it was because he was sent on that suicidal mission to attempt to sway the giants over to their side. Given what he read about giants, Harry doubted very much that they would listen to Hagrid and might even treat him worse for being a half-giant than the vast majority of humans in the Wizarding World might. It just proved that the problems of the Wizarding World extended beyond humans, magical creatures had their own flaws that proved that something might need to be done about them as well. The hatred and the bigotry went both ways.

“And now, it seems to be just a routine part of my year, but I have to announce that we have yet another Defense Against the Dark Arts teacher,” said Dumbledore with a twinkle in his eye although Harry could not help but notice it was a bit forced. “Students and faculty, I welcome Dolores Umbridge as the latest of the long line of individuals that have taken the spot of the Defense against the Dark Arts teacher.”

The toad faced woman, dressed in the most vomit inducing pink robes, stood on her feet and gave a bow as the a few of the students gave a few courtesy claps, but if Umbridge had noticed, she acted like she did not.

“Her?” muttered Neville out of the corner of his mouth, as he looked at Umbridge.

“Harry told her she would be perfect,” whispered Ginny and Harry nodded.

“Now it begins, in a couple of months you’ll see the full scale of what I mean,” said Harry, as many other members of the Great Hall talked loudly to mask what he was saying. It was obvious that Umbridge had a bit of a reputation that proceeded her.

“Now I believe...” started Dumbledore but he was cut off.

“Hem, hem!” coughed Umbridge as she looked around the Great Hall before she stood straight up to her feet. “Thank you for that introduction Headmaster, it’s an honor to be a teacher to be at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry.”

Umbridge stood straight and looked around to survey the hall. Harry braced himself. He knew he was in for a speech and that could spell absolutely boredom when coming from someone in the Ministry of Magic.

“Throughout the past thousand years, this school has gone through many changes, some for the better, some not so good, but each and every Headmaster and Headmistress that had made their way through these walls offered a unique perspective to the magical students that they oversaw in their day,” spoke Umbridge in sugary sweet voice that induced tooth decay for everyone who heard it as she looked around. “The Wizarding World has evolved beyond what the four founders have seen in their day and if they were alive today, they would find themselves in a strange new world. Progression is sometimes a necessity but rarely done for all the right reasons. Rather many people try and progress to something more unfamiliar,

that turns out to be less efficient. The attempts to do so are benevolent but unnecessary that do much more harm than good.”

Umbridge paused for what she assumed to be dramatic effect, but it only had the effect of prolonging the agony longer.

“Progress for progress sake’s should be discouraged at all costs and eliminated whenever it is not important for the continued evolution of the Wizarding World,” spoke Umbridge before she looked around. “We must maintain the old traditions that have not worn themselves out and not change them for the sake of change. The Ministry of Magic has given much room for progress but once individuals try to make their own room is where problems occur. The foundations that have held together should not be rocked, revolution should be held off. We must maintain a safe and logical world, but also learn the basics of Defense on the off chance. Naturally, there is no need for you to learn much more unless you find yourselves in a position in the Ministry, but this year, I intend to give you the solid foundation that will allow you to build upon it if you should choose to move down that path. Until then, there is no need for an overabundance of knowledge and this year will be the first steps for this school to be righted down a proper path.”

Umbridge stopped and sat down as everyone seemed numb after that speech that seemed like it went on for an eternity despite it being mercifully short from Ministry of Magic standards.

“Very well then, thank you for that Professor Umbridge, that was most enlightening,” stated Dumbledore after taking a moment to compose himself before he sat up straight and maintained his usual take charge composure but anyone who had taken a closure look could see that Dumbledore looked very shaken with Umbridge more or less questioning his authority. “I believe it is time for us to go up to bed, Prefects, lead the first years up to their dormitories if you will. Good night everyone.”

“Okay first years, come this way, please follow us!” called Harry and a small group of about fourteen first year Gryffindor students, many of them looking absolutely petrified as they took in how vast the Great Hall was and had drawn their own conclusions.

"No need to be scared, Hogwarts can seem to be a bit large at first and it does take a few weeks to get used to everything, but once you get used to it, it's a snap to get around," said Ginny and a few of the first years bravely took steps forward as they followed the two prefects. The others followed, scared that they would be left alone.

"Now, don't be afraid to ask questions about Hogwarts, we're not some faceless authority figures that watch your every move and only act when you get in trouble, we're here to make sure your time at Hogwarts is a memorable one," said Harry as he lead the first years. "Now there are precisely five paths that you can take from the Great Hall to reach the Gryffindor Common Room. This one that we are taking you towards right now is the easiest of them to remember but of course when you get more comfortable with Hogwarts and are able to find your way around, you might think differently."

The first years looked around in awe, as they walked forward. The lack of trick staircases was exactly why Harry liked to take this route to the Gryffindor Common Room. There were also many distinctive features that pointed people who were unfamiliar to Hogwarts in the right direction. In fact, he wished he would have been shown this way to the Gryffindor Common Room during his first year, it would have saved him a lot of time and trouble.

In little time flat, they reached the portrait of the Fat Lady, who looked at them with the usual business like expression on her face.

"Password?" prompted the Fat Lady.

"Misdirection," stated Harry firmly as the portrait hole swung open, that allowed them to climb inside the portrait hole and into the Gryffindor Common Room.

"Please remember that password, it will be used for the entire month," said Ginny.

"Yes, at the end of every month, there will be a change of the password that will be posted on the bulletin board in the Gryffindor Common Room and will take effect the first day of each month,"

responded Harry. "Anyone who leaks the password to an outside house may be subject to disciplinary action."

The first years entered the Gryffindor Common Room as they looked around in awe.

"This is where you will socialize for the most part, although there are many unused classrooms that can be used that talk with students of outside houses, providing you return to the Common Room by the curfew at nine o'clock," added Harry.

"As for sleeping, the girls sleep up there and the boys sleep up there," said Ginny as she pointed out the dormitories with the first years nodding. "Now, before you head up for the night, do you have any questions for tonight?"

"Are you really Harry Potter?" blurted out a first year girl as she looked at Harry, eyes widened as she studied his scar.

"Yes, I am," responded Harry and several of the first years seemed a bit overwhelmed by being in the presence of someone as famous as Harry. "Don't worry though, I'm just a Hogwarts student just like the rest of you that just happens to be prefect and have a fancy lightning bolt scar on his forehead. Really, I'm perfectly normal."

A few of the first years had smiled but more of them had not looked up from the ground.

"Now do any of you have any questions that don't regard Harry?" asked Ginny as they all look up before they slowly shook their heads. "Okay, for right now, but don't be afraid to ask me, Harry, or any of the other prefects."

"Now, I suggest you go up to bed, the first day is always the hardest," added Harry and the first years made their way up to their respective dormitories and Ginny turned to Harry once the first years had completely left, putting some anti-eavesdropping charms around them to prevent someone from overhearing them.

"First years are a bit of a timid bunch this year," said Ginny after they had left.

"They're just a bit overwhelmed, we'll be able to see what most of these people would grow into soon enough," answered Harry. "We'll see sooner or later exactly how much potential they have, how open minded they will be about accepting change. Right now, it's hard to say what their future will be like."

"So far everything's going our way, this year should be an interesting one," responded Ginny,

"In more ways than one," said Harry as he looked at Ginny with a nod. Last year, Harry spent most of his time preparing for the Triwizard Tournament and he had just learned about the Prophecy, along with Dumbledore's deceptions. Now with Voldemort returned and a better idea of how the Ministry worked, Harry in turn had a better idea what he had to do. "Everything is falling into place better than I could expect but still there is a lot of work to do."

"I know, but we'll do it, soon enough, everyone who tried to keep you down will wish they did, " said Ginny as she leaned forward and kissed Harry. Her touch and the smell of her hair were intoxicating to him. Harry returned the kiss for a few minutes. Slowly she pulled away from Harry, as he picked up the Invisibility Cloak. Neville and Luna were waiting for them in the Room of Requirement. The two slipped underneath the Cloak, with Harry taking a quick side trip to the Owlery to send a message.

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Dolores Umbridge poured a glass of fire whiskey, as she sat down into the chair of her office, as she looked around, pleased with the layout of her office. The lace was a nice cuts and the plates with kittens also added to the décor. She looked at the records of the Defense Against the Dark Arts Teachers, what they taught and scoffed. First year appeared to be the only one where the teacher appeared to teach material that would be appropriate for children. The second year was just a year long love letter from Gilderoy Lockhart to himself. The half breed and the imposter had taught

subjects far too advanced for the Ministry's liking, adding fodder to the belief that Dumbledore was training students for combat to overthrow the Ministry. The Minister about had a coronary when he learned that the faux Moody had used the Imperius Curse on students. It was among the first things that opened the Minister's eyes to what Dumbledore was doing.

Her mind went to Harry Potter. His marks were the highest in Defense Against the Dark Arts of the past two years for his year. There was a gap, with Harry Potter and then everyone else below. The fact that the boy showed such a natural affinity for the subject bothered Dolores greatly. When she tried to bring this to the Minister's attention, he just brushed her off. In fact, she could not even figure out what Potter was. From many accounts, he was a troublemaker who benefitted from a magical fluke when he was a year old but her own encounters with the Boy-Who-Lived had caused her to wonder exactly how accurate this wind spread assumption from the old families were.

Dolores did wonder if Potter was just a naïve child that she could manipulate for her own gains to gain more influence within the Ministry or a worthy potential political rival that she needed to eliminate at all costs. This is why she jumped on the chance to be the Defense Against the Dark Arts teacher, she wanted solid proof to bring back to the Minister that he was mistaken that the boy could do no wrong.

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Dumbledore sat in his office and he wondered where the exact time where everything had seemed to fall apart. It was the moment that the imposter Moody was exposed, Fudge had began to lose faith in him completely. Perhaps it was a bit before that, with the Goblet of Fire but no matter what, Fudge appeared to just dig his heels into the ground. He refused to believe that Voldemort had anything to do with it, despite his word. While he wished that Harry would have publically spoken out about the return of Voldemort, Dumbledore understood why he did not. Most people when they were placed under the Cruciatus for the first time had suppressed their memories because of the trauma involved. Dumbledore hoped that Harry would recover

from this and speak out, his fame would help persuade more than a few people to walk the correct path, to stand up against Lord Voldemort. Still, time did heal all wounds and Harry appeared to be excepting the possibility that Voldemort had may have returned. It was a start. Harry had a role to play and if his theory about the evolution of the connection between Harry and Voldemort was correct, Voldemort would inadvertently send him visions of the Department of Mysteries. The connection would grow and for now, Dumbledore needed to keep his distance from Harry, not only for Voldemort, but because of the presence of Madam Umbridge.

In the early part of the morning just before breakfast of the first day of classes, Dumbledore only retained his post as the Headmaster but winds of change moving through the Ministry and Fudge had exerted even more influence. The Board of Governors also had the power to appoint prefects for the first time in a century. Dumbledore was worried when they had chosen Harry as a prefect. Even with all the precautions, there was still a worry that Harry would go down the same path that seduced Tom Riddle to darkness. Still once again, Dumbledore was glad that Harry had the proper anchor to the correct path in Ginny Weasley.

A silvery blur appeared in Dumbledore's office that broke him out of his thoughts and a hawk appeared, before the voice of Mad-Eye Moody filled his office.

"Albus, The Minister has arrested six Aurors in the Order for treason, including Shacklebolt, off of an anonymous tip, someone in the Order is leaking information," reported the voice of Moody. "The Aurors went for me but I managed to escape, I'm at the safe house that we discussed last week."

Dumbledore's expression turned grave as he wondered who in the Order could have purposely given names to Fudge. He would have to hold a discrete investigation; it would be unwise to tip off a potential spy that he knew something was up. In fact, all sorts of explanations of what might have happened swirled through Dumbledore's mind. Perhaps Fudge had caught word of the Order and one of the people Dumbledore thought he had swayed away from Fudge was really a

double agent that answered to the Minister. Perhaps one of the Aurors that were arrested was the spy.

Still, Dumbledore wondered exactly who he could trust in his own organization. He had all sorts of well laid out plans that did not need to be disrupted.

It was rather unnerving when the only person Dumbledore was sure he could trust completely was the reformed Death Eater.

And we are ready to roll in the fifth year. All sorts of fun things are planned for this year and beyond, well at least I hope they'll be fun.

Chapter Seventeen: Inquisitors

Fifth year was a pivotal time in the lives of all young witches and wizards, the O.W.L. year was upon them. It was almost like every bit of their education was just preparing them for this one moment, the exams they took at the end of their fifth year. Whatever exams they passed would determine which classes they would take once they made their way to the sixth year and then what careers they would take after they had left Hogwarts. It was the most stressful time of the year.

Yet, Harry Potter was rather bored by the entire business. He, Ginny, Luna, and Neville had been looking over material that was much more advanced than O.W.L. level and even some of what they learned was a bit complicated by N.E.W.T. standards. Harry had no doubt in mind that they would have no problem whatsoever passing their O. at the very least, even though both Luna and Ginny were only in their fourth year.

"A lovely day of classes, Snape, Binns, Trelawney, and Umbridge all in a row, I don't think I could have even envisioned a better day," said Harry lightly as he looked over his schedule, Neville winced beside him as he heard the news. "Don't worry Neville, that can only mean the week can improve from here."

"Still, those four on Monday," replied Neville as he shook his head and Harry and Ginny both gave him sympathetic looks. "Still, I suppose you're right Harry."

"What do you got today, Ginny?" asked Harry as he turned to Ginny.

"Guess I got lucky, Charms and Herbology this morning, but History in the afternoon, should give me a nice little nap before dinner," answered Ginny with a laugh, as Neville and Harry finished clearing off their plates. "I wouldn't worry, both of you can do fine."

"I know we can, I just don't want to here everyone whine about how much homework they're getting, it would end up giving me a splitting headache," said Harry as Neville nodded by his side. "Not to mention I have to hear Granger fret about how she never has enough time to

study. I'm glad I have my prefect duties to distract me, among other things."

"Well you know I'm here to help if you need an extra distraction," said Ginny with a smile and Harry laughed, before he reached forward and enveloped into a hug, before he kissed her.

"We better get going, I'll see you at lunch," said Harry and Ginny nodded.

"Okay, bye you two, enjoy the fun morning," said Ginny as she watched Neville and Harry go. She heard as people were muttering about the Daily Prophet article that saw six Aurors sent to Azkaban for alleged treason. She was interested to see what Harry and the others had to say about this, but it might not have been the best idea to talk about in the open. Still, she had a good idea who was the anonymous tip but was curious at exactly what the motive was.

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Potions were the usual barrel of laughs. Snape had given them a long lecture, as he told the class that he only took the very best for his N.E.W.T. level classes and some of them might be saying farewell. He looked at Neville at this statement, who did not let this intimidate him like he had in the past. Harry could not wait to give Snape a brain aneurysm when both him and Neville past their Potion O.W.L with outstanding score. They brewed perhaps one of the most advanced potions that they had during their entire previous four years at Hogwarts.

History of Magic was the usual boredom. Harry took the time to go over a list of spells that he wrote down in his books, that they would be able to use during their practice session in the Room of Requirement for this evening after they had gotten their homework done. He was able to get a lot done in an hour from his seat in the back of the room, while everyone else but Hermione who was distracted by taking notes, dozed around him.

Divination, well Harry was really glad that he could step away from that subject after this year. Other than his bit of trickery to get his foot

inside the Restricted Section of the library, this class had been useless. In fact, as he looked at Professor Trelawney, it was a constant reminder of how he had to deal with Voldemort. If she had not given that prophecy, than Voldemort would not have a motive to attack his parents. While she played a minor role compared to Snape, Dumbledore, Pettigrew, and Voldemort himself, she still was the one that gave the prophecy. Still, Harry could not blame Trelawney too much, even if it made it hard to portray her as an innocent party as she constantly foretold his death. Still, the chain of events that lead to the current conflict that he had with Voldemort was kicked off by that blasted prophecy.

Right now, Harry and the rest of his fellow fifth year Gryffindors sat in the Defense Against the Dark Arts classroom. At that moment, Umbridge walked in with a bright sugary sweet smile, dressed in bright pink robes with a bow on her head. Harry felt the urge to vomit.

“Good morning class!” called Umbridge happily and Harry briefly considered if there was something in the water at the Ministry of Magic. It did explain a lot after all. The members of the class gave some half hearted “good mornings” where several others were taken aback by Umbridge’s overly cheerful attitude. Umbridge looked around with a frown. “Now that won’t do at all, not at all.”

Umbridge looked around as Neville and Harry exchanged a brief look of amusement as her attention was diverted elsewhere. As disgusted as he was, Harry could not have been more pleased. Umbridge’s mere presence encouraged the absolute hatred of the student body.

“Now when I say good morning class, I want to you to all say good morning, Professor Umbridge in unison,” said Umbridge with a sugary sweet smile. “Now all together once again. Good morning class.”

“Good Morning Professor Umbridge!” chanted the class in unison. If Umbridge noticed it was a bit forced, she did not let on at all.

“Right, now this class has been one that’s been a bit fragmented over the years, I’m afraid, you have had four separate teachers, each of them with their own unique styles and none of them that completely taught up to the Ministry of Magic standard, with one possible

exception,” said Umbridge as she looked around, as the class sat in front of her. It was obvious who they thought the exception was and it did conflict with who Umbridge thought of. “This year, I hope to right the wrongs that caused your education to be so fragmented and messed up. By the end of the year, I hope that not only will I be a proactive influence on your futures, but we will be good friends.”

Harry thought Umbridge could not have done a better job of turning off people to her if he had written her speech for her.

“Now I trust you have all purchased a copy of Defensive Magical Theory by Wilbert Silkhart,” commented Umbridge and some of the class members murmured by Umbridge shook her head. “Now that won’t do at all, no it won’t. A simple ‘yes, Professor Umbridge’ or ‘no, Professor Umbridge’ is all you need to do to answer my question. Now once again, did you purchase a copy of Defensive Magical Theory by Wilbert Silkhart?”

“Yes, Professor Umbridge,” droned the class.

“Very good now, now please place your wands away as there would be no need for them in my class,” said Umbridge and Harry allowed her to see him put away a fake wand, while he kept the real one in a holster up his sleeve. He saw Neville do the same out of the corner of his eye, but the others had put their real wands away with some amount of grumbling. Umbridge quickly moved over and wrote down a list of course aims on the chalk board. Behind his bag and her back, Harry’s grin widened with each word that she wrote. Umbridge turned back to the class. “Now read Chapter One of Defensive Magical theory, there will be no need to talk.”

Harry pulled the book out to his desk, under the pretext that he was reading it. The truth was, he managed to read it on the night before he left for Hogwarts. He had to force himself to read it, but he managed to read it. It was almost like someone took the most closed-minded view of magic and amplified it a hundred fold. It was the most backwards, least innovative book that Harry had ever seen in his life. It made Harry wonder if the person who wrote this book had even seen magic at work, especially the part that where the author suggested that a wizard should try to negotiate his way to peace,

even if a dark lord was throwing deadly spells at him. That amused Harry, he wondered what kind of idiot thought that would even be remotely a good idea.

In other words, it was a perfect book. It was all theory, with no emphasis whatsoever on the practical. Umbridge had sat down behind her desk and Harry saw Hermione raise her hand out of the corner of her eye. She had her arm stretched high to the ceiling and Harry just shook his head, as he pretended to read his book. He could almost see her cast him a filthy look for not being the one to protest. If only she had known. Umbridge spent most of the next ten minutes doing her best to ignore Hermione but eventually she looked up.

“Yes, what is it, Miss...” prompted Umbridge.

“Granger, Professor,” said Hermione as she looked at Umbridge.

“Miss Granger, do you have a question about the assigned chapter that needs addressing?” asked Umbridge through narrowed eyes. This was the Mudblood, that attempted to drug Harry Potter with a love potion. This caused much scandal with the Ministry and the stupid girl had nearly lost them Harry Potter due to their foolish feelings. Had the boy been a bit more aware of his rights, he could have left the country and resumed his magical education elsewhere. That would have left the Ministry as the laughing stock of everyone.

“No, not about the assigned chapter, but the course aims did leave some questions in mind,” said Hermione swiftly as Harry pretended to be very interested in his book, but really listened intently. He could tell that Umbridge was going to make an example out of Hermione and it was going to be great.

“Exactly what questions Miss Granger, I thought they were perfectly clear,” said Umbridge sweetly.

“Well there is nothing in there about actually practically learning defensive magic,” said Hermione slowly.

“Practical use of defensive magic, what use will that have in this classroom?” asked Umbridge.

“Isn’t there a practical portion on the O.W.L. examination?” responded Hermione.

“Indeed, but as long as you studied the theory sufficiently, there should be no reason why you should not do well enough to pass your exam,” said Umbridge.

“Without practicing them first!” shouted Ron suddenly, as the other members of the class just stared at Hermione. They did want to take her side after what happened last year with the love potion. She was an outcast in her own house, more so than ever. Before, they were cordial to her because she was friends with Harry Potter. Now, especially after what she tried to do, they regarded her if she was something they scraped off the bottom of their shoe.

“You are not to talk without raising your hand, Mr...” prompted Umbridge, even though she had a good idea with the red hair and the freckles.

“Weasley,” said Ron as he angrily threw his hand up as he glared at Umbridge who coolly stared him back down.

“Yes, Mr. Weasley, what is it?” asked Umbridge in her sugary voice.

“Well it’s just like I said, plus we need some practice for what’s out there,” answered Ron.

“There is nothing out there at all, Mr. Weasley,” scoffed Umbridge casually, as she looked at Ron who looked angrily before his hand pointed towards Harry. “Mind I ask why you are pointing to Mr. Potter like that?”

“Ask him! He saw it!” shouted Ron Weasley as he frantically pointed to Harry. “You-Know-Who is back, don’t try to deny it either.”

“Ah yes, but if I’m not mistaken, Mr. Potter has never gone on record with this belief, it was only a statement thrown out there by Albus

Dumbledore, a blatant lie to incite panic and put himself in a better light by painting the Ministry of Magic as incompetent, you heard of the six Aurors that were arrested, people have believed it within our own Ministry,” said Umbridge in disgust. “I for one will not stand by allow these lies.”

“They are not lies, Professor Umbridge!” shouted Hermione as she looked at Harry angrily who just sat there calmly looking at the bland text of the book, as he listened to Hermione figuratively hang herself. “Harry, you have to say something now, tell her that you were in that graveyard, when You-Know-Who returned!”

“Enough, Miss Granger, that will be twenty points from Gryffindor for these classroom disruptions,” said Umbridge.

“It’s the truth!” cried Hermione losing her mind. The lack of practical magic had already been painful for her. She found ever since she started practice the spells in the dark magic tomes that she borrowed from the Black library, she had to be constantly doing magic, at least every couple of hours, otherwise she would get severe headaches. The book warned that if someone who did not have a sufficiently powerful mind started learning the magic, they would eventually be driven to madness, but Hermione refused to believe that she was too mentally weak to learn any magic. She was unable to stop herself from saying the next thing to Umbridge. “You-Know-Who is back, whether or not you idiots at the Ministry want to believe it or not...”

“Detention Miss Granger, for an entire week with me, starting tomorrow evening, and a further twenty points from Gryffindor,” said Umbridge her eyes narrowed and she looked at the members of the class. “You are all to go back to reading your books and not another word. Is that understood?”

“Yes, Professor Umbridge!” chanted the class, having caught on after the third time. Umbridge just smiled and returned to her desk as Hermione looked at Harry with a scowl but he refused to acknowledge her presence.

“Granger looked like she was going to pop a blood vessel,” said Harry as he sat down in the Room of Requirement with Neville, Ginny, and Luna. They were about to start, but he wanted to bring Ginny and Luna up to date on what happened in Umbridge’s class, after they had completed their homework.

“She was staring at you like it was somehow your fault that her big mouth got her in detention,” remarked Neville.

“For an entire week with Umbridge, I don’t even know if I’d wish that on Hermione,” said Ginny shaking her head before she smiled. “Actually it does swerve her right, so yeah, appropriate punishment.”

“Now, Harry, Ginny and I have been wondering about something all day, the six Aurors that were put in Azkaban,” said Luna casually as if bringing up the fact that it was raining in the morning. “You wouldn’t happen to know anything about that?”

“Yeah, that was interesting, it does cause a bit of chaos in both camps,” said Harry as the others nodded.

“Yeah, the Order is going to be worried about people who might sell out their members to Fudge and Fudge is going to be on edge who in his Ministry is conspiring against him with Dumbledore,” said Ginny. “That kind of leaves you able to worry about Voldemort, doesn’t it?”

“Yes, even though he’s been quiet lately and that’s actually slightly worrying, as that might mean he’s up to something,” responded Harry. “Those Aurors, it is a shame they were caught and sent to Azkaban. Doubt Dumbledore would do anything to try and figure out an explanation of what happened, to get them released.”

“However, if someone just managed to dig up evidence in their favor, they would be rather grateful towards that person,” said Luna with a smile.

“Exactly, that’s what I was thinking as well,” responded Ginny.

“Of course, especially if they were in Azkaban for a couple of months, when they realized that Dumbledore might not stick his neck out for

them and get them away from Azkaban, but we'll have to wait and see, won't we?" asked Harry as he abruptly changed the subject. "Angelina told me Quidditch tryouts are on Friday, so we might not be able to do this as I'm going to be out on the field until late at night."

"So, you're going to remain on the Quidditch team this year?" asked Neville and Harry just shrugged.

"Might as well, it would clue Dumbledore in that something was off if I quit doing one of the few things he knows that I'm good at and love," said Harry. "Can't say I'm too happy about the time it's going to eat out of my schedule, but I have to keep out appearances."

They nodded, before they got to work on some of the spells that Harry and Ginny had found over the summer. The targets that popped up in Room of Requirement offered realistic effects. They slowly worked over the spells, it was said that if one tried to learn too much at once without slowly building up for the more powerful spells, it could lead to disastrous consequences.

"That's enough for today," said Harry, after they had practiced three spells that were powerful by the standards of what the Ministry considered to be acceptable but rather low end considering what the average Death Eater had used. "Ginny and I have go on patrol."

"Okay, Harry, Ginny, have a good night," said Luna.

"Yeah, good night, Harry, Ginny," responded Neville as they travelled back through the Room of Requirement through the openings it offered to their respective Common Rooms. Harry slid the Marauder's Map out his bag before he looked over it.

"Anything on there, Harry?" asked Ginny.

"Snape, Dumbledore, Filch, and Umbridge are on the move, everyone else appears to be safely tucked in their Common Rooms or in bed already," responded Harry as he looked over the map. "Oh yeah, Peeves appears to be up to no good as usual, but I checked the prefect guidelines. Poltergeists aren't our problem, it's Filch's job to keep in line."

"Looks to be a quiet night, oh how are we going to pass the time?" asked Ginny with a smirk and a comfy couch appeared right behind them. Harry put a charm that Sirius taught him on the Marauder's Map that would inform him if anyone had moved from either of the four Common Rooms and out of bounds.

"I think I can think of a couple of things that should kill a couple of hours until our shift is over," responded Harry, as he gripped Ginny around the waist, as he lowered himself down onto the couch. Ginny lowered herself down, as she straddled Harry's lap and the two began to madly assault each other's lips with passionate kisses. Harry's hand slid up the leg of Ginny's skirt, as she moaned in his mouth, as she rubbed herself against him, feeling Harry as he rubbed her leg, before he moved his other hand slowly down her other leg. Ginny encouraged him to go on, her body pressed firmly against his. As his hands explored around her, while he had trailed kisses down her neck, Ginny breathed heavily, as she slid right hand down the front of Harry's pants and gripped him firmly.

"If anyone dares move out of their Common Rooms right now, we're put them in detention," said Ginny, as she worked to give Harry the same pleasure he had given her. It was almost like some magic was egging them on, not that they needed much encouraging.

"Yes, they're pay," said Harry who would join Filch if requesting that people were being hung up by their thumbs should anyone interrupt their fun by being out of bounds, as he felt himself go harder in Ginny's grip. Slowly, he reached around and began to pull Ginny's shirt over her head. The fact that she was not wearing anything underneath had not helped the lack of blood flowing to Harry's brain. Harry slowly continued to move his kisses downward.

"Oh, Harry, don't stop, please, keep it up!" moaned Ginny, as she felt his tongue go over her nipples slowly, they hardened, Harry knew exactly how to press all of her buttons at the same time. Her fingers moved down her stomach and downwards, as he fumbled with removing her skirt, as she pulled off his shirt with one hand, while she continued to stroke him with the other hand.

“Same with you, Ginny, I don’t know how much longer I can control myself, the celebration we had was close enough but this...” said Harry, as he closed his eyes, as Ginny pulled herself off him, before she took her wand and summoned her bag. “I don’t know how much I can control myself around you, this is getting dangerous close to pushing me over the edge...”

“Then we’ll leap together,” said Ginny with a determined look on her face, as she moved through her bag. “The potion that we talked about, I managed to complete it just the other day...”

“Really, that’s great!” exclaimed Harry, who looked pleased and it was obvious a certain part of his body agreed with him as well.

“I’d figure you would be happy,” responded Ginny as she gazed at Harry, barely able to contain herself, before she removed two vials from her bag. “Now, normally they’ve said that one person needs to take it, but just to be on the safe side, it might be a good idea if both of us would take it. It will be good for up to six months, it might not be pleasant tasting, but I think we’re more than make up for the bad taste.”

“Good, excellent,” said Harry as he took one vial and Ginny took the other vial. “Now, are you sure...”

“Yes, Harry, I’m sure and yes, I know you might think I want the first time to be special, but the fact is, I’m here with you, we could do this in a broom closet, and it’d still be special just because it’s you and we’re together, it’s something we want, why bother waiting because the time could never be more right,” said Ginny as she gazed firmly into Harry’s eyes, struggling not to jump him right now even before they took the potions . “Now take the potion, I can’t control myself much longer.”

As Harry looked at the utter passion, intensity, and determination etched in Ginny’s eyes, he had to agree one hundred percent. Without those features, she would still be to him the most beautiful girl in the world, but with those features, Harry was inspired to down this entire potion with one gulp, no matter how sour it tasted. While normally, they went down to the Chamber of Secrets in a room that

they prepared, Harry had a feeling they would be too tired to make the move after they got down. It was fortunate that the Room of Requirement would provide for their needs.

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"Good evening, Miss Granger," said Umbridge with a sugary smile as Hermione entered her office.

"Evening," grumbled Hermione as she placed her bag down on the chair as she saw a piece of parchment down on the desk.

"Today and all week, you will be writing lines," said Umbridge. "I want you to write 'I will not question my betters'."

"How many times?" asked Hermione through gritted teeth as she rummaged through her bag.

"As long as it takes for the message to properly sink in," responded Umbridge with a grin as she watched Hermione pull a quill and some ink from her bag. "No, I'm afraid that won't do, Miss Granger, I wish for you to use a very special quill of mine."

Umbridge slid a quill out to Hermione, who recognized it immediately.

"No, Professor Umbridge, those quills are illegal!" shouted Hermione as she backed off.

"Only without written permission from the Minister of Magic and the Minister saw it fit to give me permission, punish anyone who was spreading terror by their filthy lines," said Umbridge happily, as if she was aroused by the thought of using such a torture device on a student. "And that will be another night of detention and a further ten points from Gryffindor for questioning your superiors."

"Dumbledore won't stand for this," hissed Hermione angrily.

"Dumbledore won't be much of anything for too much longer," replied Umbridge as she looked over Hermione. "Now the line if you please,

Miss Granger, or it will be two weeks worth of detention and another twenty points.”

Hermione took the quill, closing her eyes as she knew what would happen next. As she envisioned using some of the deadlier curses she read on Umbridge, she winced as the quill cut into her skin. Her blood appeared in the paper, in the form of the words Umbridge dictated. Her skin quickly healed over, but the stinging sensation remained.

“Hurts, doesn’t it, Miss Granger?” asked Umbridge sweetly. “No less than a filthy little Mudblood like you deserves, trying to manipulate the remaining member of a respected pureblood family for your needs. Continue to write, spill your filthy blood on the paper. If it was up to me, you’d be thrown right to the Dementors for what you tried to do, it could have caused a horrific scandal for the Ministry of Magic.”

Hermione continued to write as the quill cut into her skin, more blood being drawn, as Umbridge muttered derogatory comments in her ear about how she was a useless Mudblood who would never amount to anything. Her hand shook, as she went further along, excess blood dripped on the paper, more than the words.

“I believe that will be sufficient for tonight, Miss Granger,” said Umbridge with a smile as she held her wand before a black spell struck Hermione’s temples. “Just a little spell to make sure you don’t go telling anyone about what happened in our detentions, of course you may try but I wouldn’t recommend it.”

Hermione looked at Umbridge, her right hand a raw red. That woman was foul and she felt anger towards Harry. He should have spoken up about Voldemort, he should have been the one getting his hand sliced open in her, not her. It was not like Harry to keep quiet, something was up and Hermione knew that Ginny was corrupting him somehow, having turned Harry against his true friends. In fact, Hermione wondered if Ginny had been an entirely innocent party with the diary.

Hermione knew one thing, she would have to eliminate Ginny before it was too late. Harry needed her. He had to be miserable and falling apart without her.

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As far as Harry was concerned, his life could not have been better and more held together. In fact, it had been almost a year since Hermione and Ron had turned their backs on him and Harry felt his life had taken a dramatic upswing. Ginny was obviously the best thing that happened to him, but there were other great things that happened to his life. As a prefect, he had a greater deal of freedom to explore Hogwarts as he pleased and he had a feeling that he would uncover even a few secrets that the Marauders had not. He had begun to also have a good idea of who he could use to implement the necessary changes that his mother's letter He had tried to get to know his fellow fifth year prefects as well as he could and felt they had potential.

The thing about Slytherin was that not all of them were nasty, vicious, Muggle hating bastards with no redeemable qualities. Sure, a good seventy five or eight percent of them were, but really that was just one vicious loop. People had encouraged the belief, mostly out of the Gryffindor house, that Slytherins were evil. The Slytherins were shunned by most of the school, they turned to abusing the dark arts, and then the Gryffindors felt justified in their beliefs when the Slytherins had turned to dark wizards that killed people, thus they continued their hatred directed towards the Slytherin House. As Daphne had rightfully pointed out, most of the Gryffindor house was just as guilty for Voldemort rising to power as anyone, as they drove many Slytherins directly into his arms by their attitude that was comparable to most of the blood purist view of muggleborns. Harry did feel sort of guilty as he contributed to some of the anti-Slytherin sentiment over the past few years, but quite frankly he did not know any better, so there was no use crying over spilled potion.

The Ravenclaw house was full with bright people, but also some of them felt smug and superior in their knowledge and many went by what the textbook said even more than Hermione did. Harry saw that some of them had shunned Luna and quite frankly it sickened him.

He had taught her a security spell to place on her trunk to prevent them from stealing her things, but still they would be among the first to go. He had talked to Anthony and Padma, who had agreed to silence some of the more derogatory comments directed towards Luna. Still there while there were some revolutionary minds in that house, there were some closed minded fools who were part of the problem.

As for Hufflepuff, it was an overlooked house that Harry found himself rather interested in more than Ravenclaw and Slytherin. In fact, as he continued to sort through Voldemort's memories, he found a large number of his Death Eaters were in fact Hufflepuff alumni. He supposed it made sense. One would have been quite loyal to support a psychotic power hungry megalomaniac such as Voldemort. Still, if he could get some of the Hufflepuffs over to his side, he had a feeling they would stick with him more.

Right now, Harry and Ginny walked out to the Gryffindor Quidditch field for the tryouts. Harry saw the rest of the team there, including several other hopefuls, that included Ron Weasley. Most of them were here to try out for the vacant Keeper spot that was left open when Oliver Wood had left Hogwarts after Harry's third year and had gone onto better things. Still a few of them, like Ginny, had been here to try out for a reserve position. Remembering what happened during his first year, Harry thought having a few reserve people on hand would be a good idea.

"Ginny, what are you doing here?" demanded Ron as he walked over and looked over at Ginny.

"I'm here to try out for the reserve seeker and chaser positions, Ronald," responded Ginny calmly.

"How can you do that, when Mum won't even allow you to have your own broomstick?" demanded Ron.

"Well, obviously because Harry bought me a broomstick for my birthday, I think I'm more than able to try out for any position," answered Ginny, as she held the Firebolt that Harry bought her for her birthday as Ron's eyes widened, he looked jealous, as he saw

the ancient broom in his hands. It looked like a moldy twig next to his sister's broom.

"You don't deserve a broom that good Ginny!" shouted Ron angrily.

"Why not?" asked Ginny as she narrowed her eyes at Ron.

"Well, you're a girl and girls aren't good enough to have better brooms..." stated Ron, as he saw that Alicia, Katie, and Angelina were all glaring at him, along with a couple of hopefuls on the other side.

"That's a nice remark Ron, considering who the captain you're trying to impress is in fact a girl," said Harry swiftly.

"You stay out of this Potter!" shouted Ron. "You, trying to buy my sister off like she's a common whore..."

"Ron, if you have one brain cell in that skull of yours, you will kindly shut up before I hex your lips off," responded Harry softly, as he narrowed his eyes and even Ron knew it was time to shut up when Harry had that look on his face. He could not believe Ron would make such a remark and about his own sister as well. Harry was ashamed to ever call this dunderhead his friend.

"Keeper hopefuls over here, since we need to fill that position first!" called Angelina as Harry turned to keep half of an eye.

"You know, maybe I should try out for the Keeper position too, just to spite Ron," said Ginny.

"I think you'd be great, Ginny, no matter what position you play in," said Harry, as they joined Fred and George, as they watched the trio of chasers begin to test the skills of hopeful Gryffindor hopefuls one by one. Several of them, Harry wondered if they had ever been on a broomstick in their life. There were several that were capable players. After they moved down to the ground, Ginny stepped to the side, so the members of the Quidditch team.

"It looks like that Vicky Frobisher and Geoffrey Hooper are the two best candidates for Keeper, with as much as I hate to admit it, Ron Weasley as a dark horse candidate," concluded Angelina in a resigned voice.

"It depends on what end of the horse you're talking about when regarding Ron," muttered Harry.

"That should be obvious Harry," replied George.

"Indeed," agreed Fred as Angelina sighed.

"Look, no matter what I think of his attitude, he has potential if we train him up and keep his temper in check," responded Angelina. "Let's just focus on the other two best players before we go back to him."

"I don't know about Hopper, he's a good player, but he seems to be a bit of a chronic whiner, more trouble than he's worth really," offered Alicia.

"I thought so too," added Angelina as Fred and George nodded in agreement. Since Hopper was in their year, Katie and Harry just went along with it. It was obvious they knew him best.

"Vicky would be a good player, but she did mention that she was into Charms Club," offered Katie. "And she would go for that if there was a conflict."

"Given how often Charms meets, that could be a problem," said Angelina with a frown. "So, Ron I guess...unless there is someone else that wants to try out that's better."

"There might be, Ginny!" shouted Harry and Ginny moved over. "Were you serious about thinking about wanting to try out for Keeper as well?"

"Yes, I think I can," responded Ginny, who had a feeling that if she did not, Ron would end up on the team and it would end with a fatality, if not by Harry's hand, than by someone else on the team. The Chasers

flew up into the air on their broomsticks as Ginny made her way out of the goal posts.

Ron looked up, confident that his spot on the team was in the bag. After all, Ginny was much smaller than what a Keeper should have been and it was his right as a male Weasley to play Quidditch. He watched, eagerly anticipating the moment that Ginny would make a fool of herself.

Ron's eager expression faded when he saw his sister block every throw the Chasers threw. Every single bloody throw, and some of those throws were professional league standard.

Harry watched with a smile, as he saw Ginny. She was a natural flier, like he was, poetry in motion in the air.

"I didn't know Ginny was this good," muttered Fred by his side.

"Exactly how did she get that good anyway?" asked George.

"Stole your broomsticks ever since she was six, went flying late at night when everyone was asleep," said Harry without blinking.

"It seems like we were a good influence on Ginny after all," responded Fred.

"Even though she got to be a prefect a year early and shamed us," said George remorsefully.

"Behave you two or I might suggest to McGonagall to put you in detention with a drunken Filch for that prank you pulled on Wednesday," responded Harry and Fred and George looked at him, like a pair of deer in the headlights. "Yes, I knew about that. Remember, you might be good at your work, but I'm the heir to the Marauder legacy and I can school you rascals anytime I wish."

"Right, sir," said Fred.

"Sorry, sir, you're truly our better," added George.

“Okay, time to put this matter to a vote,” said Angelina as the rest of the chasers were on the ground.

“Ginny,” said Alicia without missing a beat.

“Ginny,” said Katie.

“Ginny,” chorused Fred and George in unison.

“I’m biased, but I think you can guess my vote,” responded Harry as the others nodded.

“And I’ll make it unanimous, Ginny, congratulations you’re the newest Gryffindor Keeper!” called Angelina as Ginny stepped forward, before Harry congratulated her in his own way. She was lost in his arms for an all too short amount of time with Ron angrily throwing his broomstick on the ground.

“Bullocks, Ginny can’t have been better than me, Potter had to put a charm on her to make her fly better!” shouted Ron, his face going red in anger.

“There’s no such charm,” said Angelina. “Otherwise, don’t you think Flint would have used it on his team when we flew circles around him the first time when Harry joined the team.”

“Yes, Ginny got on the team on her own merits,” said Harry as he looked at Ron, before he decided to use his powers to remove points from his own house for the first time. “Twenty points from Gryffindor for disrupting our try outs and be thankful it’s not more, Ronald.”

“You can’t do that, Potter!” shouted Ron.

“Actually he can and if you don’t get off, he might take more and you’re put Gryffindor in a deep hole thanks your blasted temper,” said Angelina who looked fed up about Ron’s attitude and the other members of the team looked equally peeved with Ron.

“Now get off or I will write a request to Professor McGonagall to throw you in detention,” said Harry and Ron turned, before he stormed off like a three year old being denied a sweet.

“Brilliant Harry,” said George.

“And don’t you forget it either,” said Ginny firmly as she remembered that her and Harry had already made plans to sneak off to celebrate her getting on the team, after the reserve try outs had concluded. Still, she thought it would be as a reserve and not as a member of the actual team, as a Keeper of all things. The way Harry had asserted his power added a certain allure to him and Ginny counted down the minutes until they could be alone with each other.

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Hermione felt a pain in both her hand and her head, the sleeve of her robe slightly stained with blood. Still, she felt her body shake slightly, she really needed to get that unused classroom to practice some of the magic in those dark tomes, it was beginning to become too much to bare apart from it.

“Potter, always down to him, he did this to spite me, he always gets what he wants!” thundered Ron as he stormed up the stairs and Hermione froze. She hoped that Ron would walk by her and not see her but she could not be that lucky. “Hermione, there you are, you’re never going to believe what Potter did.”

“What did Harry do?” asked Hermione in a pained voice, as she tried to ignore the splitting headache that she suffered.

“He saw that I was going to be the Keeper, so he talked Ginny into flying in the tryouts, to show me up and lock me out of the team just to spite me,” said Ron as he was red in the face. “Now she’s the Keeper, it isn’t right, I was supposed to be on the team.”

“Really, Ginny’s on the team?” asked Hermione, who was not concerned with the fact that Harry had done anything to spite Ron, but rather that Ginny had got on the team and would spend more time

with her Harry than ever before. That decreased the chances that Hermione would have Ginny alone to put her in her proper place.

“Yes, not that it matters, and then he dared take points away from me for disrupting tryouts when I tried to tell the truth,” said Ron angrily. “I suspect that he might have put a charm on Ginny to make her fly better...”

“Well it is possible, Ron, but it would have to be very advanced ark magic and given the fact that it looks like Harry...” stated Hermione but Ron cut her off.

“Oh come on Hermione, not this again, Harry might be arrogant but he’s not turning to dark magic, he wouldn’t risk ruining his public image, he loves having the spotless reputation, you saw how he used the tortured little orphan act to make Mum allow Ginny sleep to with him,” said Ron angrily.

“Ginny could have put him up to that,” responded Hermione but she winced and clutched her hand.

“What happened to your hand?” demanded Ron.

“Nothing, Ron, it’s nothing,” winced Hermione but Ron had thrown back the sleeve of her robe, to reveal the words carved in Hermione’s flesh.

“That foul bitch!” shouted Ron. He might have been a bit dim but he knew immediately what Umbridge had done to Hermione.

“Ronald, language,” responded Hermione instinctively.

“How could she be allowed to do such a thing?” asked Ron. “You need to tell Dumbledore or McGonagall...”

“I can’t,” responded Hermione and even if Umbridge had not put that curse on her, she knew Dumbledore would not do anything. He had sat back like a senile old fool and allowed Ginny to sink her claws into Harry, despite the fact she was not good for him at all.

"Hermione, that could leave serious scarring, look I'm just concerned..." said Ron.

"Spare me your concern, you idiot!" shouted Hermione which took Ron aback. "I don't need your pity or your concern. I'm just an animal to you, aren't I? A foul little Mudblood who is not a proper witch and needs to be constantly babysat by a pureblood to make sure she stays in her proper place."

"I didn't say that Hermione," responded Ron defensively. "I just..."

"FUCK OFF!" snapped Hermione. "You're not Harry, I don't like you at all like that, I never will, so stop trying to play the concerned friend, when all you want to do is get underneath my robes. You are nothing but a little jealous prick that will be seventh best among his siblings."

"Look Hermione, I don't have to put up with this at all," said Ron as his temper rose. "I gave up a lot for you, I stood by you when everyone else shunned you because you tried to put a love potion in Harry's drink. I could have even told you that wouldn't work and I don't read nearly as many books as you do. Just because you read a lot of books doesn't mean you're always right, Hermione! Yet, because I remained your friend, everyone paints me with the same brush."

"You know what, fine, I won't make you suffer any more, go crawling back to Harry, you're never be known as anything but Harry Potter's lackey anyway," responded Hermione. "You better get out of my sight before I teach you some of those curses I read in those books first hand."

"Something's happened to you Hermione, you need help," said Ron as he looked at Hermione with a mixture of anger and concern, before he walked off, to leave Hermione to stand there angrily. Sure she suffered withdrawal symptoms when she did not perform the dark arts for an extended amount of time, but she was working on controlling it. How dare Ron tell her she needed help?

"Genius move, Granger, insulting the only person that can stand your buck tooth faced," drawled Draco Malfoy as he walked over with

Crabbe and Goyle behind him. He had been enjoying the show for the last few minutes and decided it was the proper time to rub salt in the wounds.

"Malfoy, get out of my sight!" shouted Hermione as she pulled her wand out.

"Granger, I'd also tell you that it isn't a good idea to pull your wand on a prefect," said Malfoy as he looked over Hermione as Crabbe and Goyle stood over her. "Best get out of the corridors by the time I get around again, otherwise I'll escort you straight to Professor Umbridge."

Hermione stalked off angrily as Crabbe and Goyle laughed stupidly, as Malfoy just smirked.

On the other end of the corridor, Daphne Greengrass stood, hidden behind a tapestry. She had witnessed a lot of disturbing symptoms in Granger as she watched the muggleborn Gryffindor over the last twenty minutes. Symptom that indicated she had recently begun to abuse the dark arts and she was far from being able to be strong willed enough to be able to handle it. Madness lurked around the corner for Hermione Granger if she kept it up without getting help. Daphne made a mental note to warn both Harry and Ginny, she suspected this recent descent by Granger was motivated by jealousy and would immediately turn her newly found skills on Ginny once she had the chance.

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"Good evening, Dolores," said Fudge as his Senior Undersecretary sat down across him from the desk, to give her weekly report on the progress at Hogwarts.

"Hello Minister," said Umbridge. "How are things coming at the Ministry?"

"Dreadful, considering the Aurors that were found, we're working to root out any more Dumbledore supporters, we have our eyes set on

the usual suspects,” responded Fudge and Umbridge nodded. “Now do you have anything to report from Hogwarts?”

“A few cases of students spreading malicious lies, but other than that, most of the resistance to the Ministry changes are coming from the teachers,” replied Umbridge. “I feel it would be good to grant me more power, to establish the position we talked about the day before I left to do this job.”

“Ah the High Inquisitor position, it’s a jolly good idea, but it does have its flaws,” said Fudge and Umbridge raised her eyebrow. “I feel that we should have someone to represent the students better, a Junior Inquisitor if you will. After all you can’t do everything, Dolores, and this Junior Inquisitor would be able to police the students while you keep an eye on the teachers.”

“Intriguing,” said Umbridge, who realized that this would leave her more time to keep an eye on both Dumbledore and Snape, the two people she thought would be most disruptive towards the Ministry.

“Of course, in the interest of fairness, the Junior Inquisitor will have the ability to override the rulings of the High Inquisitor, but only if he has the consent of three fourths of the Hogwarts prefects along with the Head Boy and Head Girl,” responded Fudge.

“I have the perfect person for the job, a lovely young boy who will help enforce the Ministry policy well, Draco Malfoy,” said Umbridge, who also knew that Malfoy would be easy to manipulate as well.

“Draco, interesting, but I’ve had talks about him from Lucius, he says that while his son has potential, he is prone to fits of arrogance and I feel that it would be counterproductive for what we want to do,” said Fudge as he looked at Dolores. “However, I have the perfect person for this job and the Board of Governors have already given me the consent to appoint him to this important position.”

“Really, who?” asked Umbridge as she took a drink of tea.

“Harry Potter,” answered Fudge in a jovial voice which caused Umbridge to choke on her tea.

Chapter Eighteen: Preparations

The weekend was normally a rather slow time for the students at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry unless there was a Quidditch Game. The students spent most of the weekend just lazing around, socializing, or they scrambled to complete any homework that they had failed to complete during the week thanks to their procrastination. Most times, the weekend's passed with little incident.

This time however, the school was buzzing due to one news item written in the Daily Prophet, that proved that great changes were about to take place at Hogwarts. Not necessarily changes that everyone would be happy with and in fact, there were some who might think they would be happy, but in reality once the changes were finished, they would be sorely mistaken.

"Harry, is there something you're not telling us?" asked Neville as Harry and Ginny sat down at the Gryffindor Table, as he held up the copy of the Daily Prophet. "It says here that Umbridge is the High Inquisitor of Hogwarts and you've been named to represent the interests of the students as the Junior Inquisitor of Hogwarts."

"Ah, interesting, so it's happened so soon, I expected it to be a couple of months before Umbridge tried such a blatant grab at power," muttered Harry under his breath.

"I suspect you'll tell us later," responded Ginny wisely as more people chattered in the Great Hall and a few looked at Harry. Harry could see a few jealous looks, Hermione was among those giving him the looks and Malfoy looked like he was absolutely enraged beyond belief that Harry had gotten a place of power that was above any prefect.

"Yes, you know me all too well Ginny," said Harry as he was all too aware that everyone had their eyes and ears both open for anything that he might say. Still, he planned to inform Luna, Neville, and Ginny about all the details about the Junior Inquisitor position. When Fudge had casually mentioned the idea of instituting Umbridge as the High Inquisitor, Harry mentioned that unless there was a balancing influence, the students might rebel and the Ministry would have a

scandal that they could not return from. As a result, the Junior Inquisitor position was developed for that purpose, with certain balances as well and a couple of donations to the “Cornelius Fudge Pocket Fund”, along with extensive campaigning to the Board of Governors, had ensured Harry would get the position without any problems. Of course, Fudge would never realize that Harry planned to establish ties with a majority of the prefects, enough to override any of Umbridge’s decisions that were not to his liking.

As Harry and Ginny finished their meals, they prepared to get their broomsticks to go out flying for the couple of hours but they were stalled.

“Potter, Weasley!” hissed Daphne Greengrass out of the corner of his mouth as Harry and Ginny passed the Slytherin table. “I need to see you both right now, it’s urgent!”

Harry and Ginny noticed that whatever Daphne had to tell him was urgent and they decided to follow her quickly to see what was up, taking full advantage of the distraction that the news in the Prophet had caused. Luna and Neville got up from their respective tables and tagged along from a respective distance, as Harry checked the Marauder’s Map to make sure no one was following them. Fortunately, everyone else appeared to be too busy to take much notice that they had left and quickly, Harry coughed, before he pointed to an unused class room. Daphne nodded, before she moved inside with Harry, Ginny, Luna, and Neville who all followed him inside. Quickly, Harry and Ginny placed a variety of charms on the door.

“Locking spells, anti-eavesdropping spells of all sorts, silencing charms, and a mild misdirection ward,” said Harry and Daphne nodded, to Harry’s answers to her unasked questions. “Now given by the looks you were shooting at us all meal and the fact you told us to follow us you saw something that you felt that we needed to do.”

“I don’t know how to say this, but your former friend Granger, well you’re not the only one who is not the goody two shoes Gryffindor that everyone thinks you are,” said Daphne and all four of them looked at her, to encourage her to continue what she was saying.

“Well, during my prefect rounds last night, I came across her, she had an argument with Weasley and then Malfoy confronted her, but that’s not the half of it. The fact that I saw one look at her face and I saw something, tell me if this seems familiar to her. Rings underneath her eyes, looking to the side to side in a paranoid manner, severely annoyed when anyone gets in her way as if she feels like she has to do something right away, and the compulsion to turn her wand on anyone, even if it was not in her best interests.”

“Yes, that does sound familiar,” responded Harry gravely as Ginny nodded behind them and Neville and Luna who also got the grave news.

“It looks like you’re not the only one to borrow a few books from the Black Family Library,” said Luna. “The problem is, I don’t think she would even bother think of the ramifications that come with abusing dark magic.”

“Granger is just the type that would be arrogant enough to think that she could handle learning advanced magic and if those books are from the Black library, it’s likely she stumbled upon true dark magic,” said Daphne as she shook her head. “Do you think she would be so naïve to think that learning powerful dark magic is the same as learning how to Transfigure a teapot?”

“Yes, just yes,” responded Ginny as Harry looked away with a haunted look in his eyes.

“You know what this means, don’t you Ginny?” asked Harry.

“That she’s learning this dark magic in some deluded attempt to win you back, since the love potion didn’t work,” said Ginny.

“I’d be careful if I were you, Ginny,” said Daphne in a cautious voice. “I’ve read about minds that were far more complex than Granger’s snapping rather quickly under the strain of practicing too much dark magic at once. Consequences won’t be much of a concern to her before long, especially because she has this single minded obsession. The love potion only scrapes the surface of what she’s willing to do to get what she thinks belongs to her.”

"Believe me, I had a feeling she wasn't going to give up on Harry, but this extent, I didn't think she would fall this far this fast," responded Ginny as Harry grabbed to her hand in reassurance.

"Daphne's right, this is why we spent all those months reading as much as we could find about the psychological affects of dark magic and why we moderate them, Granger on the other hand might be throwing one curse after another in practice, with no regard to what happened," answered Harry. "Her mind is going to crack soon, if it hasn't already."

"She pushed Weasley away, the only person who could stand her after what she did, she's not too far away from going completely over the edge," offered Daphne. "Malfoy might be a foul inbred dunce with the personality of dragon dung and no redeemable qualities, but he does make a good point on a rare occasion. When I heard him point out to Granger how stupid she was for ditching Weasley in his own charm way, he inadvertently gave me the one warning sign that prompted me into taking a closer look at her. Then I saw all the warning signs even if Malfoy is too ignorant in his beliefs, that allow him to think that there would be no chance that a Gryffindor and a Muggleborn to boot would even dare learn dark arts but the signs are there for anyone perceptive to see them."

"I dare ask, but what about Dumbledore?" asked Neville. "As much as we've seen he doesn't really have the best interests of everyone in mind, he still has decades of magical experience. He would have to notice the signs, with all his magical experience."

"Dumbledore, he might notice, but if he didn't expel her after the love potion...I don't know, I just don't know," said Harry, who thought that Dumbledore had deluded himself into thinking that there was still some use for Hermione. That could be the only reason why Dumbledore insisted that she stay at Grimmauld Place during the summer. While, he gave some paper thin excuse about healing all wounds, surely Hermione being in close proximity of Harry and Ginny being together without an entire school to avoid them in would only serve to open those wounds wider? If anyone was to blame for Hermione's descent into the dark arts, it would be Dumbledore and

his own ignorance in seeing the good in others despite evidence to the contrary. It happened with Snape, it was currently happening with Hermione, and even it happened to a certain extent with Voldemort. Despite his suspicions, Dumbledore allowed Riddle to fade slightly into obscurity and allowed him to gain power. By the time he returned to assert his power, Dumbledore did not take the steps needed to turn off potential followers. Through Voldemort's memories, Harry knew that Dumbledore knew all too well about Voldemort's parentage and even something as releasing that information would have weakened Voldemort's forces, turning off perspective followers. Yet, Dumbledore did nothing, except gather intelligence and capture a few Death Eaters by sheer luck, but mostly he stumbled around, perhaps in a hope that Voldemort would impale himself on his own wand and to an extent that's what happened.

"Harry?" prompted Ginny.

"Just thinking about a few things, I don't know if Dumbledore will notice, he might, but he does have his mind elsewhere because of his severely decreased power," said Harry.

"The fact that we know something is up, will allow us to be on our guard for anything," offered Luna. "Perhaps if young Miss Granger is not far gone, we can try and talk some reason into her, maybe get her some help before she becomes a threat to us and several innocents."

"An admirable idea, Luna, but one thing about that, the fact for the help to work, Hermione needs to accept that she needs help and I don't see that happening," replied Harry as he shook his head sadly. The Hermione he thought he knew was dead to him.

"She seems to think this is necessary, she thinks she should be the one with Harry," said Ginny and Harry pulled a face in disgust about at the idea of being on Hermione. It would never work and would only end in pain for both parties. Hermione would nag him to the point of madness and Harry had enough of that growing up with Aunt Petunia. "Still, the fact that she is willing to go into the dark arts without first looking up the ramifications shows that she is even more far gone than you can believe."

"Well people do insane things when they think they're in love," answered Neville.

"I think the right term for this would be in a state of deluded obsession," corrected Luna calmly.

"I'll go with Lovegood in this one, be careful both of you, if you either of two die, then there goes any hope for the Wizarding World ever pulling itself out of the pathetic state it is now," said Daphne as both Harry and Ginny were taken aback by the Slytherin girl's statement.

"We're keep all eyes out for Hermione, she won't catch us off guard, but now we know not to travel in the hallways alone," said Harry. "Especially Ginny, but she might attack any of us if she thinks it will help her cause."

They all nodded. It was obvious they should keep their wands on them at all times. Ginny was glad that her and Harry had that private room in the Chamber of Secrets, because as it was probable that Hermione would try to kill her in her bed.

"Still, the moment that Granger gives me an excuse, I will use my powers to suggest an expulsion from Hogwarts, but I can't do it based on circumstantial evidence," said Harry and the others nodded. "Not that anyone would challenge me, after what she did last year, but..."

"We understand perfectly, Harry," said Neville as they had no need for Harry to explain.

"Still, if she does pull her wand on me, she's taking her chances," responded Ginny firmly, who refused to be intimidated by the likes of Hermione Granger, even though she was slightly worried. Not for herself but her friends or to be more specific Harry. Hermione had proven that she was willing to do anything.

"Indeed, Harry, I understand you can't do anything on the record, but I thought I'd pass the message along," answered Daphne, who removed her wand, before she frowned when she was unable to remove the spells that Harry and Ginny had placed on the door. "Could you please remove these locking charms?"

“Right, sorry about that,” said Harry, before he consulted the Marauder’s Map. “The coast is clear by the way.”

“Right, I don’t know how managed to fix the door where you were the only one that would be able to open it, as that type of magic is normally far beyond N.E.W.T. level,” said Daphne before she just looked at both Harry and Ginny who had smirks on their faces and realized that she was not going to get any answers. “Right, I forgot, you’re going to make me think about it and perhaps one day you’ll let me in on the secret.

“Good to see you’re catching up,” answered Harry as Daphne just shook her head as she walked from the room. She was a Slytherin of course, Harry had a feeling she would do everything she could to find out what she could but Harry knew that he could trust her not to blab the full extent of his abilities. Mostly because he had taken a peek in her mind and saw no ill intentions. A bit of curiosity, but nothing that would give Harry a reason to modify her memory. Plus, given the fact she was a Slytherin, the people that Harry did not want to find out about his abilities might not believe her anyway. Their loss, but a loss that Harry could live with because it benefitted him one hundred percent

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The last few months had been rather eventful and quite frustrating for one Albus Dumbledore. The fact that very few in the Ministry believed him about Voldemort returning and now even less would rise to the occasion to support him after the recent action with six Aurors being put in Azkaban for treason. It was obvious that Fudge was willing to crack down on anyone who supported Dumbledore and people were unwilling to risk losing their jobs, much less spending time in Azkaban.

As for the person who was behind it, Dumbledore was baffled completely. Several potential leads turned up dry. It was obvious that this person had cleared their tracks after they revealed the Aurors to the Minister. While, Fudge was out for lunch one day, Dumbledore had someone search his office, but nothing was found. No messages, no secret methods of communication, nothing, so Dumbledore was

back to square one. The meeting last night had been a tense one, as several members of the Order looked at each other with suspicion. Any one of them could have been a spy and many of them came close to outright questioning Dumbledore about his ability to keep their participation confidential. It was all Dumbledore could do to prevent at least half of the Order outright quitting. They were needed to help guide his plans for Harry.

As for Harry, well Dumbledore had heard the news that was all over the Daily Prophet this morning. There was the unfortunate news that Dolores Umbridge had been named the High Inquisitor of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, which Dumbledore saw as a direct slap in the face courtesy of Fudge. It gave Umbridge power to inspect the teachers and put any on probation that she felt would go against the Ministry edict. That just proved to Dumbledore that he was one final step from being shoved promptly out the door and he had to maneuver carefully if he wished to return once Umbridge and Fudge had both proven themselves to be incorrect about the Voldemort situation. Still, while Dumbledore had heard about the rumors of Umbridge receiving this newly established position of the High Inquisitor, the fact that Harry was named the Junior Inquisitor had caught him completely out of left field. Come to think of it, the fact that there was a Junior Inquisitor position that would be established had caught Dumbledore completely by surprise. He had not heard of it until he had read the Daily Prophet today.

Dumbledore was in two minds about this entire Junior Inquisitor position. On one hand, he was still a bit uneasy due to the fact that Harry acquired another position of power. Not as uneasy as he would have been had he not had Miss Weasley to anchor him to the proper path, but still, Dumbledore felt a tiny bit of uneasy. On the other hand, Dumbledore could not be more proud of Harry. Dumbledore knew from a variety of sources that the Minister of Magic had arranged for Harry to visit the Ministry, in an attempt to gain publicity by being seen talking to Harry Potter. He had known this since a bit before the third task of the Triwizard Tournament and at first Dumbledore wanted to put a start to this. However, the entire Voldemort business started up, Dumbledore focused his attention on trying to spread the word but Fudge had promptly used his influence to shut him down on some rumors that Dumbledore was using the students of Hogwarts to

form an army to overthrow the Ministry of Magic. The Headmaster suspected that Lucius Malfoy was behind this little idea being planted in the Minister's head but naturally he could not prove it yet.

Still Harry had been at the Ministry and somehow must have found a way to worm himself into Fudge's confidence slightly. Harry had seen what Fudge did to his mentor and worked on a way to neutralize Fudge's influence, using some previously untapped cunning. This Junior Inquisitor position would hopefully be enough, but Dumbledore hoped that Harry was adept enough to win over enough of the prefects to override Umbridge when it counted. At least the plan showed promise and proved that Harry had managed to find it in himself to forgive Dumbledore about the Dursleys. Now if only Sirius would do so, Dumbledore could finally put that entire matter to rest. Still it proved that Dumbledore's hold on Harry had not weakened and his plans still remained in tact.

"Enter," said Dumbledore to a knock on the outside of his office and the door pushed open to reveal Ron Weasley, who entered Dumbledore's office. The youngest Weasley male looked rather nervous and yet worried at the same time. "Ah, Ronald, what an unexpected pleasure. Do have a seat and make yourself at home."

Ron nodded as he sat down right in front of Dumbledore. This was the first time he had actually interacted face to face with the Headmaster, without Harry or Hermione there and the experience was a bit overwhelming to say the least.

"No need to look so tense, Ronald," said Dumbledore with an encouraging smile and a twinkle in his eye, before he pushed a candy dish towards Ron. "Lemon drop?"

Ron took the lemon drop eagerly without any hesitation, one of the three people to ever take one ever since Dumbledore had started offering them. Oddly enough, one of them had been Lord Voldemort himself and the other escaped Dumbledore's mind right now, but he suspected it would return to him if it was important for him to recall who it was.

"So Ronald, I trust this is not a social visit, so tell me what's on your mind," prompted Dumbledore kindly with a twinkle in his eye as he looked at Ron.

"Well, Professor, it's about Hermione, I don't know, but something about her is off," said Ron slowly, as it did sound a bit strange as he came out of his mouth. "She started yelling at me when I showed concern about her and those detentions that she had with Umbridge..."

"Professor Umbridge," corrected Dumbledore as he cut off Ron.

"Yes, her but when she returned from detention, her hand was bleeding, blood was all over her robes," answered Ron frantically. "When I confronted her about it, she told me off, yelled at me, said all kinds of horrible things. Something's wrong with her, sir."

"Now, Ronald, I'm sure you are overreacting, I'm just sure Miss Granger is going through a tough time," responded Dumbledore as he looked at Ron. True, he did notice a couple of things off with Hermione's behavior, but he had not had time to take a closer look with Umbridge basically breathing down his neck. Besides, Hermione barely had any use for him anymore. "Her mental health is something that she has to deal with herself, it is likely stemmed from the unfortunate incident last year."

"Of course, everything always has to be about Potter," said Ron angrily before he forgot about where Dumbledore is. "It's all his fault that she's like this..."

"Do not blame Mr. Potter for the choices that Miss Granger has made," said Dumbledore sternly, the twinkle in his eye had disappeared completely. "He did not force her to abandon him once his name had been taken out of the Goblet of Fire nor did he force her to slip that love potion into his drink. Rest assure that I will look into your concerns but I cannot directly step in. It is beyond my jurisdiction as Hogwarts Headmaster to directly interfere in such personal matters."

"But, Professor Dumbledore, Hermione might need help, do you think..." stated Ron.

"I will do what I'm allowed to Ronald, but now Hermione needs you more than ever, it's your responsibility to help her through this time, not mine," responded Dumbledore calmly, as he looked at Ron.

"But, you've helped out Harry before why can't you help out Hermione?" demanded Ron and Dumbledore just sighed, thinking quickly for the perfect way to pacify the Weasley boy.

"Look Ronald, you enjoy playing chess, correct?" asked Dumbledore.

"Yes," said Ron slowly, as he failed to see where his idol was coming with this statement. What did Hermione have to do with liking to play chess.

"Then you must understand that there are times where sacrifices must be made to achieve a greater victory," answered Dumbledore cryptically but Ron was confused completely. "I feel that there is nothing to worry about with Miss Granger, she is just going through a tough time. I've personally seen it happened before and it will happen again until I go on to the next great adventure. Nothing to be concerned of, just be there and support her and everything will work out in the end."

"Of course, Professor Dumbledore, I might have overreacted," said Ron as his worries subsided slightly. Dumbledore had told him that Hermione would be fine and what reason would Dumbledore have to lie? He was a great wizard and Ron was not even worthy to be in the presence of the esteemed Hogwarts Headmaster. "Sorry for wasting your time sir..."

"No waste at all Ronald, a concern for a friend is never a waste, but remember, we must exercise good judgment with our concern," said Dumbledore. "Now, perhaps you should get going, I suspect you have some last minute schoolwork to complete. I remember my Ordinary Wizarding Level year and I found myself with a lack of free time. Now run along."

Ron left quickly as Dumbledore sat, with a sigh. The fact was Hermione Granger was far below his radar right now, with any luck, she would do something in the presence of Umbridge that would get her expelled and thus remove that headache from the school. Dumbledore still had hope that Hermione would see that Harry was not hers to have and would make a few steps towards recovery on her own accord. If not, well whatever happens, happened.

Right now, Dumbledore knew that his time as Hogwarts Headmaster was coming to an end, at least for the time being. It could be measured in days, weeks, or if he was lucky months. Still, sooner rather than later Fudge and Umbridge would both remove it and Harry's new position was quite fortunate, no matter how unexpected it was. Dumbledore had the utmost confidence that Harry could keep Umbridge in check for long enough, until Lord Voldemort had stepped into the light. Given Dumbledore's theory that the connection between Harry and Voldemort would continue to grow, sooner or later, Voldemort's continued obsession with the prophecy would spill over to Harry and all roads would lead to the Department of Mysteries, where Albus prepared to take his next step to prepare Harry for his destiny. The same destiny that he had prepared Harry for since the moment that he was born.

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The brand new Hogwarts High Inquisitor was in her office, in an attempt to figure out how to schedule her inspections around her Defense Against the Dark Arts classes. Umbridge smirked, there were a few teachers that she would have loved to see out of a job and replaced with Ministry approved professionals. The students at Hogwarts were given too much freedom of their opinions and the teachers did not to crack down on anti Ministry sentiment. Changes would have to be made for the Wizarding World to remain the way it should be, as this was the next generation, not that the generation that had been in place for some time. The Junior Inquisitor was an unexpected problem, but Dolores doubted she had anything to worry about. The brat needed three fourths of the prefects to overturn any of her decisions and there was no chance that many people would jeopardize their future jobs at the Ministry.

“Hem, hem,” coughed a voice that cause Umbridge to look up and see a smiling Harry Potter

“I don’t remember giving you the password to my office, Potter or inviting you inside,” said Umbridge coldly. “How did you get in here anyway?”

“Now come on, Dolores, that’s no way to treat a co-worker,” responded Harry, as he watched Umbridge’s eye twitch, when there was nothing she could do to him. As Junior Inquisitor, he was exempt from punishments such as detention and having house points taken from him.

“Yes, the Junior Inquisitor position, I do wonder how many galleons to Cornelius that set you back,” said Umbridge as she bit her tongue to hold back an even more venomous retort directed towards Harry.

“Now, Madam Umbridge, I’m hurt, thinking I’d resort to bribing the Minister of Magic, when it was obvious that I was voted in unanimously by all twelve members of the Board of Governors, within moments I might add,” said Harry with a mock hurt look. “I’d really watch where you throw those accusations, Madam Umbridge. Accusing the head of an old pureblood family of something without evidence could land you in a lot of trouble, especially one who is famous for vanquishing a Dark Lord and beloved by most.”

“Just what do you want anyway, Mr. Potter?” asked Umbridge in her sugary sweet voice, even though it was very forced.

“Just sign one piece of parchment and you won’t have to deal with me outside of class for the rest of the weekend,” answered Harry as Umbridge looked at him. “Or don’t sign it, and I stay here to disrupt you when you’re trying to grade those papers.”

“Hand it over, Potter,” said Umbridge as she took the parchment and signed it without reading it. She wanted to get Potter out of her hair as soon as possible. If there was one thing she hated more than filthy half breeds, it was teenagers, especially those who had as much power as she did. Umbridge slid it over but she froze when she realized . “What did I just sign?”

“Oh nothing much, just a magically binding oath to say you won’t complain about me abusing my power if I get your decisions overturned legally or try to expel my friends to force me to play along,” said Harry casually as the High Inquisitor put her hand to her head. The boy was not leaving any avenue open for Dolores to manipulate him “Also, you gave me the authority to inspect both the Potions and the Defense Against the Dark Arts classes.”

“Now, Mr. Potter, I don’t think it will be necessary for you to inspect my class, I’m a Ministry approved educator,” said Umbridge in a strained sweet voice.

“In the interest of fairness, I feel that I will that each class should be given an inspection, to see if they are dangerous and disruptive to students,” said Harry and Dolores looked absolutely confused at what could be dangerous and disruption about a class that only taught theory. “Don’t worry, Dolores, I will treat your class with the same respect and fairness you would if you were inspecting my teaching abilities.”

This obviously did not reassure Umbridge.

“However, a deal’s a deal and I’ll leave you to your work,” said Harry as he turned to leave Umbridge stew in her office. He exited the office and checked the Marauder’s map. Only, Ginny, Luna, and Neville waited at the end of the corridor, underneath Harry’s Invisibility Cloak. Ginny slightly lifted the cloak so he could join them all underneath. “Everything went off with a hitch.”

“Excellent,” answered Luna with a smile. “The pieces are beginning to fall into place.”

“Did she sign it without reading it like you said she would?” asked Neville and Harry nodded. “I can’t believe she would fall for such an obvious ploy.”

“I can,” said Luna. “She obviously never expected Harry to slip her something that would tie her hands as much as it did.”

"Her loss," said Ginny as she shook her head at the utter arrogance of Dolores Umbridge. "Well, Quidditch practice went smoothly and we have a few hours before dinner and the prefect meeting, so let's try and get some training time in the Room of Requirement."

"Sounds like a brilliant idea, how about you two, what do you think?" asked Harry as he turned to Neville and Luna.

"Sounds like a plan Harry," responded Neville.

"Indeed, you can never have too much training," added Luna as it was settled, the four friends made their way to the Room of Requirement. If Harry's plans went according to schedule, there were a few things they had to brush up on.

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To say the least, the prefect meeting was enlightening to Harry Potter. He already knew about the fifth year prefects, but this was the first time he had really interacted with the sixth and seventh year prefects and found them to be a rather interesting lot. It was obvious that the one's for Gryffindor would be on his side for anything and the Hufflepuff and Ravenclaw prefects were also very friendly towards Harry when he made some small talk towards them. It was the upper year Slytherins that regarded both Harry and Ginny coldly, in fact they appeared to be the epitome of the worst stereotypes of the Slytherin House. Also, they were children of Death Eaters who were acquitted by using the Imperius Defense and that said a lot of Snape's thought process during his part for suggesting students for prefects.

"So what did you think about them Harry?" asked Ginny, as they descended down into the Chamber of Secrets.

"An interesting group, most of them actually might tend to go with me, if I explain my stance well enough," said Harry. "With a few obvious exceptions."

"You mean every Slytherin prefect, other than Daphne, until this year, the worst of the worst in Slytherin was chosen to be prefects," said

Ginny with a smile as they moved their way down to the Chamber of Secrets. "Too bad you can't replace prefects."

"I know, but who could I replace them with?" asked Harry. "Malfoy, unfortunately, is the best person for the job in his year for Slytherin, as scary as that sounds and I've found out enough about the sixth and seventh years that tell me there aren't too many good candidates, if any. "

"Yes, I know, besides soon enough we won't have to worry about people like Malfoy having any kind of power, you're getting closer to making your move," said Ginny as they entered the room.

"We're getting closer and even with that, we still have a long way to go," said Harry, as he sat down on the bed with Ginny right next to him.

"The end of the journey will be worth it, Harry and everyone who is worth anything for the future will see it," said Ginny with Harry's hand grasped firmly in hers and Harry nodded but with each passing day, he realized even more how inept the Ministry of Magic was. The government as it was would have to be torn down completely. Also, as long as Voldemort and Dumbledore lived, any changes would not matter, but a collaborated effort Harry, Ginny, Neville, and Luna had developed long term plans on dealing with those two. Whether or not they would work, well that fact along remained to be seen.

Right now, Harry's mind was shifted away from what needed to be done to what he wanted to do, as his and Ginny's lips met together, the intensity of the kisses increasing with each attempt to do so. It was just as well, he seemed to have a bit more energy than normal and it appeared Ginny did. They would have to do something to remedy that.

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Daphne Greengrass had a lot to think about over the past week. Actually, it started during her fourth year at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, once Harry Potter's name came out of the Goblet of Fire. She was amused that anyone could have believed that

Potter had put his name in the Goblet of Fire to begin with. Anyone with a working set of eyes could have seen that Potter was uncomfortable with his fame. And truthfully, no one in Slytherin really bought it, they just used it as an excuse to continue their verbal assault. Of course, most of the house gave it up once they realized that Potter was not interested in what they were saying. In Slytherin a verbal attack was never fun unless the recipient reacted with violence. That's the reason why Ron Weasley was such a constant target for mockery, especially from Draco Malfoy but from others as well.

Potter's friendship with Granger and Weasley quite frankly baffled Daphne. It was Harry Potter, the defeater of the greatest dark wizard in this century and that's what he had for friends. An insufferable know-it-all who thought she was a magical prodigy just because she memorized a bunch of books and an utter buffoon with a personality that made a newborn baboon looked civilized. He could have done much better and ever since those two turned their backs on him after the Goblet of Fire, he had. Daphne was amused that Granger thought she would ever be worthy of licking the slime off of Harry's shoes, much less being his girlfriend.

The moment that Harry and Ginny got together, it was almost like they were always together. Any other girl would have looked out of place with Harry Potter, for one simple reason. Harry did not need someone who was less than him, someone who he would constantly worry about his enemies using to hurt him and constantly be worried about her being in danger. Harry needed someone his equal and who could handle herself about as well as battle. Ginny Weasley personified that quality completely. Granger, on the other hand, not only would have looked completely out of place as Harry's girlfriend, but the moment she got into a battle, she would get torn to shreds easily. Without her precious books, she was nothing.

Daphne observed Harry and Ginny and to a lesser extent, Longbottom and Lovegood, as best she could over the past year. The group had remained illusive and she had to use every ounce of her Slytherin cunning to even have the foggiest notion what they might be up to. Best she could tell, Harry was planning for a big battle, bigger than Voldemort. It was almost like if they were their own side, independent from Voldemort, Dumbledore, and the Ministry of Magic

and sooner or later, more people would have to be let in to achieve their goals. Whatever those goals were, because Daphne only had a vague idea what those four were up to and most of her theories were gathered by reading between the lines. A key skill for Slytherins and one that left way too much room for error, but always gathered something vaguely resembling the truth.

Still, if there was a revolution brewing, Daphne wanted to be with the quartet instead against them. None of the sides that were established really appealed to her beliefs on magic anyway and they were out for themselves, rather than for the benefit of people like her. It was not that she was neutral, but the fact that all of the sides repulsed her to different extents. With this new option, a glimmer of hope presented itself.

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Susan Bones returned to her dormitory after the prefect meeting, deep in thought at several observations she made over the evening. Namely, the fact that Harry and Ginny had a more assertive presence than the Head Boy and Girl, there was something about them that commanded respect, even if that was not their intention. They also represented something else and Susan was certain she was not the only one who had this thought.

Harry Potter and Ginny Weasley represented hope for a more balanced Wizarding World. There had been many within the Ministry of Magic that tried to establish positive change, Susan's aunt being among them but few had gotten very far before they were shut down. Mainly because they made the mistake of going in without a deal of influence and also partially because the Ministry of Magic was traditionally extremely resistant to change. Harry had played a very political game and chose his battles extremely wisely. Something told Susan that he had blatantly went out of his way to avoid talking about the rumors that You-Know-Who returned. Whether or not that monster had returned was irrelevant, the fact remained twice last year Harry had been the victim of schemes formulated by former Death Eaters. In fact, Harry had been a victim of a lot of incidents and Susan doubted these were a coincidence.

Truthfully, she had not interacted with Harry all that much, but the few times they did, Harry appeared to be a very approachable and nice person. It was Hermione Granger who seemed rather annoyed when anyone but her or Ron was near Harry, especially if that anyone was a girl. It was quite fortunate that they turned their backs on Harry, best thing that could have happened to him and he was free to pursue friendships that were more of a benefit to him.

As for Harry's other half, Susan had to give Ginny credit for one thing. She did something that no other girl in Hogwarts had the guts to do. She got to know Harry Potter as a person, not as the Boy-Who-Lived. Much like pretty much every pureblood girl, Susan did have a small crush on the Boy-Who-Lived and was slightly disheartened when she saw that she missed her chance once Harry was Ginny. Still she realized it was nothing to brood about and besides it was all for the best. Despite the fact that she was more patient than most, Susan would go mad if she had to deal with half of the things that Harry did and Ginny would be strong enough to go through everything with Harry.

If You-Know-Who did in fact return, Susan felt that Harry would be the best possible option for that monster to finally be put down for good. She knew first hand through her aunt that the Ministry was not strong enough to defy him and most of them would fold to him to save their own skin. In its current state, Voldemort would overthrow the Ministry in hours. Dumbledore, while his abilities were well known, he barely was able to hold back You-Know-Who last time. Besides, he was not getting any younger.

Susan had lost far too many family members to that monster already and others she knew had suffered similar losses. Harry had beaten him once, through luck mostly, but still he had won. If they had any hope to put You-Know-Who to rest once again, Harry needed all of the support to defeat him again. It was because Harry that Susan had lived through most of her childhood without fear. It was the least she could do.

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Severus Snape swooped into his first year Slytherin and Gryffindor double Potion class in a bad mood. He had spent most of the previous night in recovery from the Cruciatus Curse at the hands of the Dark Lord. It was partially because of the lack of information that he was able to give the Dark Lord, but partially because of the foul mood that came with another failed attempt to obtain the prophecy. Snape found it a bit irritating that the Dark Lord was obsessed with this Prophecy, but had to keep in line for his work in a spy. Still, before his resurrection, Snape could not remember the Dark Lord being even shorter tempered than he was now. He was not the only Death Eater who felt like he had to walk on egg shells.

The sight he saw did not improve his mood. It was Harry Potter, who sat on a chair with a clipboard on his lap.

“Potter, I could have sworn this was not your time to be in my class, but perhaps your arrogance has deluded your mind’s ability to recall your schedule properly,” said Snape swiftly.

“Ah, Professor Snape, but I trust you did get the notice that today was the day of your Ministry mandated inspection,” said Harry without blinking as he looked Snape right in the eye to show that he was not intimidated. Predictably, Snape took advantage of this opportunity to employ Legilimency on Harry, a gross error of judgment on his part. This left Snape’s mental defenses open for long enough for Harry to get some solid information regarding the recent plans of Dumbledore and Voldemort.

“Not that is any of your business, but yes Potter and I had assumed Professor Umbridge was to be the one to undertake the inspection,” said Snape.

“Yes normally that would be the case, but as Junior Inquisitor, I was authorized to do so, Snape,” responded Harry.

“That’s Professor Snape to you, Potter,” snapped Snape.

“Well, Severus, making demands of the person who is inspecting you, that’s not going to get off on the right foot,” said Harry as he saw Snape’s face contort into anger. “Let’s not forget I’m the Junior

Inquisitor and have the ability to make or break your nice cushy job as the Potions Professor.”

“The Junior Inquisitor, a position that you don’t deserve, it has only served to make you more arrogant” said Snape.

“The Board of Governors would disagree with you, but if you want to take it up with them, be my guest,” said Harry and Snape opened his mouth to respond, before he cut him off at the pass. “And while you’re there, I’ll come along to cite evidence of all the times where you blatantly favored your own house while bullying those in the others. Nine cases of your seventh year Slytherins bullying Muggleborn first years and not one detention given by you at all. Sad, Severus, really, glad I now have the ability to put your Slytherins in detention for you if three fourths of the prefects second my motion. Just pass on the message to your charges and tell them there are going to be a few changes.”

Snape refused to answer for a few seconds.

“You’re going to use this as an opportunity to gain petty revenge for a grudge you have against me, Potter,” said Snape.

“Hello, Mr. Pot, my name’s Mr. Kettle, and we’re both black,” said Harry as he looked at Snape. “Don’t worry, Severus, I’ll give the same fairness that you gave me when I when I walked into this class for the first time during my first year.”

Snape just turned away from Harry, without another word as he stormed forward. Harry felt that using his new found powers to make Snape’s life more difficult would be something that Dumbledore would not blink an eye at. The mutual animosity between the two was something that even Dumbledore would have to see.

“The instructions are on the blackboard, the ingredients are on the blackboard, you have an hour, begin!” commanded Snape.

“Abrasive towards students, gives vague instructions, leaves inexperienced first years to their own devices,” muttered Harry as he made a note as he watched Snape move around after a while, with

critique. He saw a very confused first year Gryffindor girl and saw her desperately raise her hand, in need of assistance, but Snape appeared to be doing his best to ignore her. Harry cleared his throat and tapped his foot, while he held his quill an inch away from the parchment. Snape got the hint and grudgingly went over to help the first year. "Slow to help students outside of his own house, shows distaste in helping non Slytherin students."

He watched Snape intently, as he struggled to remain calm as the girl, who obviously was totally lost, struggled to understand what he was saying. Harry looked at Snape the entire time, the clipboard ready and the ten minutes that Snape tried to help the girl without saying anything abrasive had to be torture. In fact, Harry was astonished that the Potion's professor did not pop a blood vessel in his head and to a small extent, disappointed.

"Please take a vial and place a sample of your potion inside, use your dragon hide gloves to handle it as this potion can sting if exposed to bare skin," said Snape as it appeared to cause him great physical pain to use the word "please" and the group of students moved up one by one to turn in their samples. A few of the Gryffindors had "efforts" that would make Crabbe and Goyle laugh at them for being so useless and Harry knew Snape had exercised every bit of self control he had not to say anything snide towards the quality of those potions.

"Well, that was fun," said Harry as he compared the samples given by the Slytherin and Gryffindor houses. The rumors that Snape offered Slytherins private tutoring and shunned the students from the other three houses when they asked for help. Harry made a few more notes as he looked over his four and a half pages worth of notes that he made. "Well, you'll be receiving the results of your inspection within the next ten days to two weeks."

"I'm bubbling with anticipation," said Snape sarcastically as debated on whether or not to go straight to Dumbledore with his complaints about Potter overstepping his bounds but Dumbledore refused to believe that anything was off against his little golden boy. He had deluded himself about Potter, despite the fact that Snape had repeatedly given Dumbledore his opinion that the boy should be

expelled for being an attention seeking brat who put himself and others danger with his arrogance.

"I know you are, Snape," said Harry as he moved off. He would submit the result of his findings to the prefects, to vote on whether or not Snape should be put on probation. Harry had a feeling what the result was going to be but he was never one to make assumptions.

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"Okay, let me ask you this question," said Harry, as he was in the Room of Requirement with Neville and Luna sitting right across him on a chair and Ginny in his lap, her head lazily leaned against his shoulder as Harry's arms were wrapped around her. She was a bit tired after she overtaxed herself a bit in practice. "If you were Voldemort, what would be the one thing you would be obsessed with beyond all else?"

"Working towards overthrowing the Ministry," said Ginny as if this was the most obvious thing in the world.

"Eliminating Dumbledore, the only person he's been said to fear," offered Neville.

"Or killing the person who was the cause of his first downfall," suggested Luna sadly as all four of them shuddered at the thought of that unfortunate possibility.

"Good answers, but all wrong," said Harry as he looked at all of them, as Ginny shifted in surprise in his lap. "All in Voldemort's plans, but not the thing he's obsessed with. The prophecy, it's the bloody prophecy."

"Dumbledore was right then for once," answered Neville.

"For once," agreed Luna.

"The problem is the thing that the Order of the Phoenix is guarding is a well fabricated fake," answered Ginny. "Remember Harry switched the real prophecy with a fake over the summer."

"I just don't get Riddle sometimes, the most powerful dark wizard in a century and he's obsessed with a glass orb that detailed something that he caused by his own obsession already," said Harry. "Does he really think that it would tell him to beat him?"

"According to what we've learned from those Order meetings that you recorded, yes I think he just might," said Luna.

"It's vague, all it says is that you are marked as his equal and you have power that he knows not," said Neville in a confused look. "How can that tell Voldemort anything even it's open to a lot of interpretation."

"Riddle's own obsession will be his downfall, he might easily be able to be lured into a trap with the prophecy," said Harry. "His obsession with immortality has caused him to take the drastic step and make multiple Horcruxes that had reduced his soul to almost nothing. He knew it was dangerous to make more than one and yet he did it."

"Speaking of the Horcruxes, what about the ring?" asked Neville. "You said you would go after that next."

"Christmas holidays, right Harry?" asked Ginny.

"Yes, we'll need plenty of time, it's well protected and even with Voldemort's memories, I'm leaving nothing to chance," said Harry. "In addition, I need to fabricate a decoy to put in its place."

"Why?" asked Luna curiously.

"It might be the best protected but it will be the easiest to find as well and if Dumbledore ever does anything about the Horcruxes, that will be the first one he will find," said Harry as he shook his head. "On another note, the plan is working. I've hearing that quite a few people are upset about Umbridge and even better, many of them are the type I feel that we can trust."

"So, the Defense Against the Dark Arts training club will happen then," said Neville who appeared to be eager about the possibility.

“Soon enough, but give it another month, to really let Umbridge sink in,” said Ginny and Harry nodded in agreement.

“Exactly what I was thinking, Ginny,” said Harry. “We’ve got to prepare contracts for anyone who joins this group, that they will not betray us or any of our secrets to our enemies. That will take enough time.”

“Not as much of a problem as you might think, once we get the first contract charmed, it would take a simple duplicating charm and the parchment will be copied along with the spells intact,” said Luna.

“Excellent, Luna, I knew there was a reason why you were sorted into Ravenclaw,” said Harry as he thought that everything was going smoothly so far, but also realized he should not get overly confident. “There might be a lot of work to do, but if everything goes right, we won’t be the only people to shoulder it anymore.”

Whew, there’s that chapter, which was a lot longer than I thought it was going to be. Next Chapter, Harry and friends recruit more people to help their goals, Umbridge tries to assert her authority more, Harry psychoanalyzes Voldemort, more dissension spread within the Order and the Ministry, and much more. The fun has only begun(at least I hope).

Chapter Nineteen: Revolution

Ten days after the inspection at the hands of Harry Potter, Severus Snape entered Albus Dumbledore's office in a bad mood. It was because the brat had dared judge that his teaching techniques, Snape felt that Potter was unfit to judge him about anything whatsoever. Snape sat himself down on the chair in front of Dumbledore's desk.

"May I help you Severus?" asked Dumbledore.

"I've just received the results of the alleged inspection that our Junior Inquisitor gave me," said Snape as he looked in Dumbledore, as he read over it. "It is a result of these findings, along with interviewing several Hogwarts students, and a majority vote of the prefects, along with the Head Boy and Head Girl, that I, Harry Potter, the Junior Inquisitor of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry put Severus Snape, the Potions Professor, on probation. If Professor Snape continues his current teaching habits he may be subjected to further disciplinary action and possible termination of his responsibilities if it agreed to by a vote of all Hogwarts prefects plus the Head Boy and Girl."

Snape held the paper in his hand.

"Potter deliberately fabricated evidence to use against me," said Snape when Dumbledore said nothing. "His arrogance has finally reached a level that even James Potter never managed. There has to be something done to strip him of this power, it's going to his head and no one in their right mind has to think that arrogant brat is right for such a responsibility."

"Severus, I for one have seen that Harry is doing a remarkable job as Junior Inquisitor, even in the short amount of time, harassment of muggleborns is down and house unity is up, I for one approve of his job performance so far," answered Dumbledore as he calmly looked Snape in the eyes. "Perhaps he was a bit strict in his criteria, but it is no more than you had been during the previous four years when you graded his performance in your class."

"The arrogant brat is out to ruin me," argued Snape firmly, unable to believe anything but what he was saying.

"You see what you wish to see, Severus," replied Dumbledore. "Who is to say that Dolores would not have offered similar observations had she been the one to evaluate your performance? It is well known that I helped you get out of Azkaban and have used your dark mark as an attempt to convince Cornelius that he was mistaken about not believing Voldemort's return."

"That's another thing about the Dark Lord, I don't know what childish game that brat is playing, but I say we force him to tell the world everything that happened on that night, he's hiding something," answered Snape.

"Remember, Severus, I did gather a good deal of what happened from his memories and pieced the remainder together," argued Dumbledore as he looked at Severus. "Also, you say that Harry maliciously went after you but as you as well know, whatever happened was partially brought on by your actions and your inability to let old wounds properly heal. It is a shame, but there will be a day that yourself and Harry must work together. Especially considering my theory of the evolution of the connection between Harry and Lord Voldemort."

"The connection that is proven by nothing but a whining letter the brat said to the flea bitten mutt and a bunch of vague nightmares, that might have been concocted to get in the same bed with his girlfriend," replied Snape.

"That is far from my only evidence Severus, when the time is right, I will tell you all," said Dumbledore.

"Will the time ever be right for you, Headmaster?" asked Snape, unable to stop himself from voicing a very real frustration that he had with the Headmaster.

"Patience is key to all great victories," said Dumbledore and Snape sighed irritably. When Dumbledore started talking in riddles, Snape always hated it. "Nevertheless, back to the connection, as I

mentioned, there is a time where Harry and you must work together and it will be soon. Over the Christmas holidays, I will introduce the idea, based on this growing connection, for Harry to receive private Occlumency lessons to help him deal with this connection.”

“You don’t believe that the connection can be closed, do you Headmaster?” asked Snape.

“Not due to the unique nature of the magical backlash that caused it no, but I feel that by using these Occlumency lessons under a pretext of closely studying the connection,” answered Dumbledore. “Only then can it be seen how far it has evolved and if my plan will work.”

“Yes, Headmaster, but there may be just one thing about this,” answered Snape, who decided to omit the obvious fact that Dumbledore could not really force Potter to have lessons without a good reason, due to his Junior Inquisitor position. He would allow the Headmaster to learn that lesson the hard way. “Dolores Umbridge has been keeping a close eye and teaching Occlumency, especially to a minor, is prohibited unless written consent is granted by the Ministry of Magic. Should you be caught, this could give her the excuse that she has been looking for to throw you out of Hogwarts and maybe into a nice cell in Azkaban. So how prey tell do you intend to teach Potter and not allow Dolores Umbridge to find out?”

“Ah Severus, an excellent question but a certain flaw in your belief is that it would be myself that would teach Potter, is wrong, I will not be the one to undertake that task,” said Dumbledore as he looked at Snape.

“Then who do you trust enough to teach Potter Occlumency, if not yourself?” asked Snape even though a part of him knew what was coming and thus dreaded the answer.

“Severus, there is no one better for the job than yourself,” said Dumbledore, as he knew Harry would not make an effort to learn Occlumency and maybe discover what the connection was himself if Snape had taught him.

“No, absolutely not, Dumbledore!” shouted Snape who was absolutely repulsed in spending a moment of time alone with the demon spawn of James Potter. “Need I remind you that Potter might use this as an excuse to hold another vote with the prefects and terminate me from my job. If that happens, the Dark Lord may murder me in days or did you forget my reports? He is selective with what information that he considers worthy recently and should I be removed from Hogwarts, he might lose confidence with my ability to obtain that worthwhile information.”

“My memory is as superb as ever, Severus,” answered Dumbledore with a twinkle in both eyes. “You have nothing to worry about, Severus, if Harry is convinced that this will be a way to eliminate those nightmares and perhaps eliminate any connection he would have to Voldemort, he will go with it, at least for the short term.”

“If you believe so, Headmaster,” said Snape, as he exited the office. He believed Dumbledore was making a colossal error in judgment with this Occlumency thing. There was something about Harry Potter recently that had given Snape reason to believe the boy was not what Dumbledore believed him to be. It made Snape uneasy and if he had brought his concerns up to Dumbledore, the Headmaster would have brushed them off easily. Partially because Dumbledore refused to believe that he made a mistake in guiding Harry on what was allegedly his destiny. Snape hoped that Dumbledore was right, for both their sakes and the boy remained a mere puppet. More and more, Snape saw hints that Potter may have severed those strings and there was a chance that Dumbledore would get strangled by them if he remained naïve. Yet, Dumbledore had just brushed off every concern that Snape had about Potter since his first year and he was not going to change his philosophy.

Dumbledore sat in his office. Severus had asked many questions recently, some of them that would be answered in a way when the time was right. Both Severus and Harry were key components in Dumbledore’s plan to topple Voldemort and Harry’s subsequent rise to be Dumbledore’s successor, his heir to an extent. With more than a few aches in his joints and slower steps, Dumbledore knew the sands of time ticked down on him. Perhaps a few more years and Dumbledore could check out, satisfied that there was someone in

place that would be able to continue to lead the light as Dumbledore did.

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"You can't catch me, Harry!" cried Ginny playfully after Quidditch practice as they were flying their broomsticks over the pitch. It was a couple of weeks before the first Quidditch Match against Slytherin and practice had just concluded, but Harry and Ginny were not done flying. There was still an hour until they had to go on prefect duties and they were making the most of the excellent weather.

"Now, Ginny, that's where you're wrong, I'm the youngest Hogwarts seeker in a hundred years," responded Harry as he watched her bolt off in the opposite direction but Harry adjusted his positioning before he moved after her on his Firebolt. He was pleased that the contracts that he planned were ready to go, at least three hundred of them, with working charms on them, that should be more than enough for now. After the first Quidditch Game was over, Harry planned to put out some feelings in all of the houses. Gryffindor and Ravenclaw would be the easiest, but based on their conversations in prefect meetings, Harry had a good idea that he could trust Susan Bones and Daphne Greengrass to get the word out in both Hufflepuff and Slytherin, to find people worthy

"Yes, you might be, but I don't know if you're good enough to catch me," called Ginny, as she swooped around the pitch, with Harry giving chase to her, with a smirk on his place.

"Yes, but I've caught every snitch but one and that was the one I was unconscious for when the Dementors came," answered Harry as he continued to loop around the pitch, realizing that he gotten closer. "Of course, I was never as motivated to catch something on my broomstick than I am right now. Not even that snitch that I accidentally swallowed."

"I doubt that was an accident, Harry, we all know how talented you are with your mouth," answered Ginny as she slowed her broomstick down slightly, but then increased the speed. She wanted Harry to

catch up with her but not too soon. It was all about building anticipation as they continued to race around the pitch.

“You know it,” answered Harry with a smile, as he increased his speed, as he watched his girlfriend’s flaming red hair whip in the wind as they continued to fly around the Quidditch pace. She turned slightly with a smile that encouraged Harry to try to pick up his speed. Even if he crashed his broomstick, it would be worth it. As he moved closer, the flowery scent from Ginny’s hair had continued to encourage him to pick up speed. He dove slightly, as he saw Ginny pick up speed and then he popped up right in front of her, before he grabbed her around her waist as she was still in mid air.

“Okay, Harry, I’ll give you credit, you managed to win,” answered Ginny as she looked into Harry’s eyes with a smile as she eagerly anticipated what happened next.

“I’d like to think we’re both winners actually,” responded Harry as he pulled Ginny forward, their lips meeting together in mid air, as Harry opened his mouth slightly, to allow Ginny’s tongue entry. How they managed to remain suspended in mid air while they continued to kiss, Harry would never know. He expected it would have to have something to do with their natural talents on a broomstick.

Ginny moaned as Harry’s tongue worked its way inside her mouth. She had remembered reading somewhere that Parselmouths were talented in this area and having done enough first hand research to verify that theory. They continued their fun until the broomstick shifted slightly from underneath Ginny, but as always, Harry was there to catch her. Harry hoisted up Ginny onto his own broomstick, so they faced each other, as he took Ginny’s broomstick, before he positioned it so it floated gently to the ground on its own accord.

It was something that blatantly flaunted every rule of broomstick safety that there was, not that Ginny cared and she had a feeling Harry was not complaining all that much, as she felt her head tilt back slightly, as Harry trailed kisses down her neck, while he held onto her tightly in his arms. After a bit, Ginny returned the favor, alternating slightly as the situation warranted. They continued this activity for some time, before they made their way down. The wind had kicked

up to an extent where even they could not keep up the activities on the broomstick properly. So they made their way down onto the field, where they could properly continue the fun without Harry having to readjust the broomstick.

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Hermione sat in her darkened dormitory with a blood shot look in her eyes and black rings underneath them, as she obsessively poured over one of the many dark arts tomes, nearly salivating at the power that pure power that a couple of these spells gave. If she had known how fulfilling learning dark magic was, she would have tried to do so years ago. The truth was, the feeling it gave her every time she had a spell was simply intoxicating. One dark arts spell was not enough, she had to do up to ten or twelve a day to have her lust properly satisfied. All on targets that were charmed to look to Ginny Weasley, as seeing that slut being ripped to shreds in a variety of different ways was nearly orgasmic. It was too bad it was not for real, but soon enough, all would be right. All of them, they were out to keep Hermione away from her destiny, away from her beloved Harry. Dumbledore, Ginny, Ron, Mrs. Weasley, Sirius, Snape, Draco Malfoy, Umbridge, all of them were out to get her but Hermione was no quitter. She would be stronger than all of them and would save Harry back. He might protest at first, but he would grow to accept it, one way or another. Hermione would not give up until she had Harry. After all, he had to be brainwashed if he thought that Ginny would be a better choice than Hermione. Hermione licked her lips at the thought of a decapitated Ginny Weasley laying at her feet and her and Harry snogging over her disfigured corpse. Soon it would be reality, her precious Harry would be hers alone.

Still, the power she received with the dark arts was beyond anything she could have ever imagined. Hermione's grades slipped since she returned to Hogwarts, but it was nothing to her. Learning the mediocre magic that was taught by Hogwarts did not appeal to her. Even if her grades plummeted, it mattered little to her. Once she had Harry on her arm, he would use his influence as the Boy-Who-Lived to get her any career she wanted. It was no less than she deserved after all that she did for Harry. Without her, Harry would be dead by now and soon he would realize that.

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Dolores Umbridge sat in her office. Her post as Hogwarts High Inquisitor had not been as smooth as she would thought. While her goal would be to replace Dumbledore as the Head of Hogwarts and eventually Fudge as Minister of Magic, those goals met their share of snags. Certainly, she was able to expose Trelawney as a fraud and set the wheels of motion for her to be removed. The entire subject of Divination was a waste in Umbridge's opinion but the Board of Governors refused to rock the boat at Hogwarts too much to remove the subject completely. It mattered little, Trelawney was a target, Dumbledore had protected her for many years, despite several reports of her inept teaching and Dolores wanted to know why.

Harry Potter, was the bane of her existence. Right now, they had clashed precious few times, but the matter of Potter's mystery inspection of her Defense Against the Dark Arts disturbed Umbridge. He had declined to share with her the results of the inspection, although what he could have inspected was a mystery to her. Several pureblood students were victimized by Potter, as he disrupted the balance of power by punishing them by trying to put unworthy Mudbloods in their place. That blasted oath that Potter coerced her into signing had prevented her from doing anything to block him. The fact that all the punishments went through proved that Potter had the support of all the prefects and perhaps the Board of Governors as well. The Minister of Magic had obviously grown fond of Harry's donations and would not move against him. Others in the Ministry would not go against Fudge as long as they had their cushy positions.

Dolores looked over a fist year essay. She had a couple of educational decrees in mind that might help assert her power but knew that might provoke Potter into full defensive mode. If the right amount of gold got donated to Cornelius, there could be a chance that Dolores would end up in Azkaban on trumped up charges. The Minister had refused to see Harry Potter as anything but a very popular tool that he could use for his own benefits to increase his popularity rating. Umbridge on the other hand saw him as a disruptive force with too much power that was in danger of ruining her entire life's work.

Of course, Dolores Umbridge never rose to her high ranking position in the Ministry without stepping on a few important toes and putting even more people down before they could be anything. Somehow, once the opportunity presented itself, she would neutralize Potter and cut him off at the knees before he started to become anything.

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Daphne made her way down a corridor, towards the classroom that the note Harry had slipped her during the last prefect indicated that she should go through. It said it was important and out of curiosity, no matter how morbid it would be. She had her wand on her at the ready to curse anything that looked cross eyed, and looked over her shoulder. Unlike Harry, who seemed to have this odd ability to know when someone was close by, Daphne had no such abilities. So she was ready to attack anyone who looked like they might be a threat.

Sure enough, at that moment, Daphne froze up when she heard footsteps from the other direction. Quickly she held her wand out, but relaxed slightly when she saw Susan who walked down the hall.

"Daphne, what are you doing here?" asked Susan in surprise.

"I suppose I can answer the same question to you Susan," answered Daphne before she realized what was up. "You got a letter from Harry too, didn't you?"

"Yes, I did, I suppose you don't have an idea what it's about either," said Susan.

"I have some ideas but I could be wrong," offered Daphne with a shrug. Truthfully she hoped to gain some hint, no matter how small about what exactly the quartet was up to. It would be a perfect opportunity

"Perhaps we'll find out soon enough," said Susan as they reached the classroom and she stepped back to allow Daphne to open the door. The moment the two girls entered the classroom, the doors shut themselves and were locked.

"I wouldn't try and open that, only one person, maybe two, would be able to open it," answered Daphne as she watched as Harry, Ginny, Neville, and Luna stood towards the back of the room, strange considering that they seemed to not be there a moment ago.

"Hello, Daphne, Susan, thanks for coming on such short notice," answered Harry as he motioned for the two girls to step forward. "Please step inside and have a seat, there are some things we need to talk to you about."

Daphne and Susan sat down on the chairs, curious to what was going on.

"Now, I'm sure the both of you have noticed the substandard quality of the Defense Against the Dark Arts teaching this year," said Ginny and the two girls nodded.

"You mean Umbridge not teaching us anything and having the most boring book in the history of magic, that blatantly says that doing anything proactive to protect yourself is an vile act," answered Daphne.

"Yes, that lovely book, I don't think anyone could have done worse if they tried," answered Susan, who was very upset about the lack of practical dark arts knowledge. Contrary to popular Ministry belief, anyone with half of a brain knew that studying the theory did not substitute for practical experience. Since she planned on working in the Department of Magical Law Enforcement, she needed top marks in Defense Against the Dark Arts and Umbridge had cut a year of experience out of her plans. Lockhart might have been worse, but at least there was comedic value to his books as how ridiculously bad they contradicted each other.

"Well, Harry's had an inspection and he's come to a conclusion that something needs to be done about Umbridge," said Neville.

"Unfortunately, Umbridge meets the Ministry requirements, so I have no ground to get her sacked," said Harry. "Plus the Ministry of Magic

needs to think they have their control. If Umbridge was removed, she could disrupt everything.”

“Yes, I see your point, make her think she has power,” said Daphne as she nodded her head.

“However, we have every right to make an alternative to the current method of teaching Defense Against the Dark Arts,” said Harry. “Therefore, I have plans to arrange trustworthy people to be taught practical Defense Against the Dark Arts lessons.”

“And where do we come in?” asked Susan.

“Well, it’s obvious we already have our foot inside Ravenclaw and Gryffindor, so it will be easy for us to find people worthy of being taught,” said Luna.

“Indeed, while we have our ideas, you two are more familiar with your housemates than we are, so you can discrete spread to word to people who may be both upset about Umbridge’s ability to teach and you think can be trusted to be open minded enough to do what needs to be done,” answered Harry.

“Yes, good, but how do you know you can trust us to find you the right type of people?” asked Daphne. “In fact, how do you know you can trust us period?”

“Because, I’m Harry Potter,” answered Harry, who decided it might not be the best idea to tell the girls that he was a master Legilimens and had gathered a great deal of them during their prefect meetings.

“Point well taken,” said Daphne as she shook her head.

“When do you want us to get these people ready, Harry?” asked Susan. “And where are we going to meet up to do this behind Umbridge’s back?”

“On Halloween we’ll start,” said Harry as the others nodded in agreement. “As for the where, we’ll get the location to you when it’s a little closer to the time we started.”

"Yeah, don't worry, there should be a prefect meeting a couple of days before, less time for it to get leaked, not that we haven't taken all the precautions necessary against that," said Ginny.

"Halloween, that gives us a little over three weeks to get everyone together," said Daphne, who appreciated the significance of when the quartet was going to start this suspected revolution, on the fourteenth anniversary of Voldemort's first defeat.

"Should be more than enough time, if you need any other help, just let us know," said Susan.

"Don't worry, we will," said Harry as the two girls moved over to the door, with Harry removing the charms he placed around the door to allow them to leave. That left the four friends in the room.

"Halloween, eh, Harry?" asked Neville.

"Well it is appropriate, the beginning of the end of Voldemort starts on the day that everyone thought he was defeated the first time," answered Harry as he was deep in thought. There was much to do with this Defense Against the Dark Arts group, if he hoped to build his army. Not to mention the Christmas holidays crawled closer and his plans with retrieve the ring from Gaunt Shack. Then there was a matter of evidence that would present itself regarding the Aurors and how they were misled by Dumbledore to think they were helping the Ministry through their actions. By the time that information got to the Ministry, Harry knew that they would not be too pleased with Dumbledore for not doing more to bail them out. Since they already had distaste towards the Ministry, there was good reason that they would look towards an alternative.

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"What do you mean you've failed to obtain the Prophecy?" demanded Voldemort as the Death Eater cowered right at his feet.

"I thought I could use one of the Unspeakables, Bode, to get inside the Department of Mysteries, to grab it, my Lord," pleaded Avery.

"The moment he touched the shelf, he went all funny, and collapsed, I just barely got away."

"Fool, your bumbling could have gotten you seen, there must be some security measure that you overlooked and now if Bode recovers, he may be able to inform the wrong people that you were there," said Voldemort coldly as he stared down the cowering fool. "Now I must deal with Bode as well and have him eliminated. You are to find out what went wrong."

"Y-yes, my Lord," stammered Avery as he closed his eyes fearing the worse.

"Leave me now or I may change my mind about punishing you," said Voldemort and Avery nearly tripped over his feet. Normally, Voldemort would be amused at the cowardly antics of his Death Eaters but he was just merely indifferent to the entire ordeal.

The botched ritual that returned him to power still had its consequences nearly six months after it occurred. The potion that Severus prepared for him had stopped the fits of pain he suffered, but at a cost of leaving him only with a fraction of the magical power that he had before. Granted, a fraction of Lord Voldemort's power was far greater than the average pathetic wizard, but the Dark Lord was absolutely disgusted that he was depowered by this mere act of incompetence by Wormtail. Wormtail rotted in Azkaban at this moment and Voldemort made plans to break him out, to punish him for his incompetence. The lack of power had bothered Voldemort greatly and he poured through every tome he could get his hands on to find the knowledge to rectify the solution immediately.

The solution appeared to be a rare and obtuse one, but given the unique connection that he shared with Harry Potter caused it to be a plausible one. One of the few pieces of useful information that Severus managed to share with him was that connection, perhaps a plan could be put in motion to use Potter to retrieve the prophecy, once he figured out exactly how the connection between the two worked. It was an area of interest for Voldemort, even beyond retrieving the prophecy and his most fanatical followers from inside the walls of Azkaban. Those short term goals were directly tied into

his long term ambitions in being the most powerful wizard in the world and the ruler of all magical people.

Still the ritual that Voldemort came across would allow him to transfer his consciousness into the body of Harry Potter. It would allow him to have a more youthful and durable frame, one that had been proven to withstand the killing curse and cast him out of this flawed body that was caused by his minion's incompetence.

Soon, all would bow down to the feet of Lord Voldemort like the vermin they were.

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"And Gryffindor beats Slytherin four hundred and sixty points to zero in an amazing shut out victory when Harry Potter catches the Snitch despite the fact that all seven members of the Slytherin team attempted to dive bomb him simultaneously!" boomed Lee Jordan in a loud voice. "With bad results I might add, with four of them having crashed into the ground, Draco Malfoy just barely able to hang onto his broom, and the other two just stopped in mid air right now."

Harry nodded, as he saw Draco Malfoy giving him nasty glares as if this was his own fault. Ginny quickly swooped down and leapt off her broomstick, before she threw her arms around Harry. Harry hoisted her up into the air in celebration as they kissed, as cheers happened around from the amazing victory and the other members of the Gryffindor team moved forward.

"That was a great catch Harry," said Ginny as they finally broke apart from their kiss. "That really won us the game."

"You played your part well Ginny, they didn't manage to get even one goal past you," answered Harry, who realized that the heightened reflexes that Ginny acquired during their dueling practice had most likely contributed to their victory.

"Well, we're ahead in the rankings by a significant margin," said Angelina in a pleased voice.

“Not to mention the fact that Slytherin is deep in the hole with no points, thanks to Ginny stopping all of their attempts for goals,” answered Alicia but Ginny just waved off their praises.

“You got all of those goals through that pushed us so far ahead until Harry got the snitch,” said Ginny.

“Not to mention that Fred and George’s ability to keep the Slytherin team off balance,” said Harry.

“Well I think we all did our part,” offered George.

“Indeed, it was a team effort, so if we keep doing what we do, Hufflepuff and Ravenclaw won’t be much of a problem in all,” said Fred.

“Well if you keep playing like this, I have a feeling that it’s going to be a pretty frustrating day in the Ravenclaw house after you play them,” said Luna as she made her way onto the field with Neville. “Really good performance out there, that was a good catch Harry.”

“Considering all the Slytherins went after Harry and he still managed to get the Snitch, I’d say it was good,” said Neville.

“Their desperation proved to be their downfall,” said Harry. “If Malfoy had actually went for the Snitch himself, there is a chance that they might have avoided a humiliating defeat.”

“I don’t think there was too much of a chance,” said Ginny, as Harry laughed as he grabbed her hand.

“True, Malfoy has been known not to get the Snitch even if it was on top of his head,” said Harry.

“Yes, that wasn’t bad, in fact that was great, but Hufflepuff and Ravenclaw are going to be different than Slytherin, we’ll going to have to employ different tactics against them,” said Angelina. “We can’t afford to be lazy just because of one victory, we need to practice harder than ever.

“Yes Oliver er Angelina,” said George in a patronizing voice as Katie and Alicia both giggled as Angelina just decided to ignore them.

“Still, we did beat Slytherin and I think that’s cause for a party,” said Fred as he rubbed his hands together in anticipation.

“That sounds like a great idea,” said George as he turned around.
“Doesn’t it Harry?”

There was no Harry there to answer or Ginny for that matter as they both walked off.

“I think they’ve had the same idea that you did to celebrate the victory, only they’ve decided to do it privately,” answered Luna.

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A hooded figure entered the Hogs Head, as he walked out to the table where Albus Dumbledore sat. Other than those two men and the owner of the bar, Albus’s brother Aberforth, there was no one inside the bar. The figure sat down across from Albus and pulled down the hood to reveal the scarred face of Mad-Eye Moody.

“Sorry it took me so long Albus, the Ministry Aurors are still on my arse and even though the standards dropped since I became an Auror, they’re still an annoyance,” grumbled Moody.

“No problem at all Alastor,” replied Dumbledore. “What do you have to report about your investigation?”

“Nothing that we have not already hashed out, whoever we’re dealing with has covered his or her tracks,” replied Moody. “Not to mention the culprit behind this treason may be secretly a ruthless mastermind, with decades of pure manipulation behind him, to remain illusive for this long. I told you we should have done extensive background checks on all of the new recruits.”

“A mistake that has come back to haunt us,” said Dumbledore. “Still there may still be a chance for us to catch the person and take the necessary steps to neutralize them if they’re inside the Order.”

“The thing is, while it could easily have been someone inside the Auror, it could have been from a source outside of the Order,” suggested Moody. “Most likely one of the Order members, Fletcher seems like a likely suspect, had a bit too much to drink and began slipping information to the wrong people. Those people took the information to the Ministry and we have our six incarcerated Aurors.”

“Then perhaps we should consider ourselves lucky that not more of us have found our way behind bars,” answered Dumbledore as he shook his head. “It could be any number of explanations, from the perfectly plausible to the illogical, yet somehow possible. It does have everyone looking over their shoulders in the Order. There is some distrust in the Ministry, but the distrust in the Order has reached unseen heights.”

“Well if only one good thing came out of this, is that everyone is going to be more cautious,” said Moody

“We can’t be at each others throats if we hope to guide Harry to defeat Voldemort,” answered Dumbledore and Moody just gruffly nodded, he had made his stance on the Potter issue well known in the past. Dumbledore had put all of his eggs in one basket and that tended to backfire more often than not.

“I’ll be going now Dumbledore, I have to keep moving, the Aurors may pick up my trail soon enough,” said Moody as he walked off. “I’ll see if I can’t dig up even more information but it doesn’t look too promising.”

“Do what you have to do Alastor and contact me immediately if you find anything,” said Dumbledore as he was deep in thought. Once the individuals or individuals behind this were found out, Dumbledore wished to deal with them personally. Whoever they were, they had put Harry and his destined path to be Dumbledore’s successor through his defeat of Voldemort in grave danger. The Order of the Phoenix needed to remain in place and at full strength for this to work properly.

At least a hundred students from fourth to seventh year from all four houses sat around on chairs in the Room of Requirement, as they eagerly awaited this proposed new Defense Against the Dark Arts study group. On the stage, there were six seats open and five of them quickly were filled by the Daphne Greengrass, Susan Bones, Ginny Weasley, Luna Lovegood, and Neville Longbottom. The sixth seat remained empty and a figure stepped from the shadows. The brilliant green eyes, messy hair, lightning bolt scar, and confident expression on his face were familiar. Harry stepped up, with the stance of a seasoned political leader.

“Good evening everyone my name is Harry Potter,” said Harry as a few people laughed. “You may know me from the defeat of dark wizards such as Lord Voldemort.”

Harry paused as he waited for the noise to die down.

“Now, this year, the Defense Against the Dark Arts class has been severely crippled in its ability to properly prepare students for the danger ahead, because of a Ministry that is governed on principles that are over three hundred years out of date,” said Harry. “As Junior Inquisitor, I inspected Umbridge and while I can’t fire her because technically she has not broken any Ministry restrictions in her teaching, I can offer up this viable alternative to the lackluster, mediocre effort that she gives during her class. Many of you are prefects and I see the Head Boy and the Head Girl in the crowd, welcome. Enough of you to help me make a decision of making this group unofficially official. On the off handed chance that Umbridge does find out about this group, after this first meeting, I will allow you a chance to vote to approve the group. This decree will remain secret, unless Umbridge should by some fluke uncover what we do here and try to shut us down. I encourage you to approve, but I’m only one vote.”

Harry took a deep breath.

“Defense Against the Dark Arts, it’s an interesting subject, one that is put too much emphasis on the actual spells and not the techniques on how to properly employ what spells you know. It’s not what you

know, it's how you use it," said Harry and a few members of the crowd looked at each other like it as a foreign concept. "I knew that would be coming, but perhaps a preview of what I hope to hope you teach you. Could all the seventh year students in attendance please make their way up here for a demonstration here?"

At that moment, fifteen people got from their seats and walked forward, to exchange curious looks, as Harry stood, unblinking.

"Once you here the sound of a bell, I want all of you to attack me...simultaneously," prompted Harry and he got his share of gaping mouths.

"All of us at once, you can't be serious?" asked Angelina.

"Yeah Harry, mate, are you sure you haven't take too many Bludgers to the head?" asked George who actually looked concerned about the mental sanity of his sister's boyfriend.

"Yeah, because that's blooming mad," said Fred. "Fifteen seventh years, against one first year, that's just crazy, even from the guy who beat a fifty foot Basilisk when he was twelve."

"Surely even you don't think there is a hope that you can beat us," interjected a seventh year Ravenclaw boy with a frown as many of the seventh years looked dubious. "The odds against it are impossible..."

"I know I can defeat each and every one of you and I'll do it by only using Ordinary Wizarding Level spells," answered Harry in a self-assured voice, as everyone looked at him like he had finally went fully around the bend. "I'll activate a dome around us, so no one is struck by the spells and Ginny, on my signal, you know what to do."

"I do Harry," confirmed Ginny, who clutched her hands together. While she was confident that Harry would be fine, instinctively she was the teeniest bit worried.

Harry gave the signal and the bell ring. Immediately, a loud explosion echoed in the protective dome and a cloud of smoke filled the dome.

“Potter, where did he go?” asked a girl in desperation.

“Well he couldn’t have gone far!” yelled a second voice as the smoke cleared as a shadowed figure began to move slightly around and two of the students sent stunners through the mist but both dropped to the ground when they struck each other. The voice of Alicia Spinnet shrieked she was wrapped in thick cords and another student fell to the ground, arms and legs snapped together.

“He should have been right there...” said a seventh year Hufflepuff right before she was dropped to the ground with a stunning spell.

“There he is!” shouted George as he pointed out Harry, but a bright light filled the dome before they could send the spells. Two more figures were incapacitated and a third dropped to the ground, a victim of a mild nausea jinx. Another was hit with a banishing charm and slammed it another one of the seventh years. The impact from their heads clonking together knocked them silly. Another smokescreen filled the dome.

“No wait he’s over there!” yelled a voice in the distance and a seventh year Ravenclaw girl turned her attention, away, which was a mistake as she got a stunner right in the back. Fred Weasley was the latest victim of a dizziness jinx that caused him to collapse to the ground. Angelina Johnson was placed in a full body bind after she had let her guard down after she blocked a stunning spell.

It less than five minutes, the only two students left were George Weasley and one of the handful of Slytherins to join, in fact the only seventh year, Anastasia Jacobs, were left against Harry. Well, George was not left for long, as while he blocked the full body bind and the stunning spells, they only left him open for a Jelly-Legs jinx, which distracted him long enough to be nailed with a stunner.

“Potter I know you’re in here somewhere, you can’t hide forever,” said Anastasia with an intense look on her face. She had mostly kept her back to the wall with a shield spell in front of her as she watched the other fourteen in front of her. She saw a figure move and in his moment of arrogance, Potter had left himself open. “STUPEFY!”

Anastasia was pleased that she put down Potter but when she rushed forward, she blinked when she saw the glamour charms fade from the face, to reveal one of the students that Potter defeated earlier. She had been duped and the next thing she knew, she was unconscious with a stunning spell.

The dome disappeared as the smoke cleared and Harry stood in the center, with the defeated seventh years on the ground.

"I think I've proven my point," concluded Harry.

"No kidding," muttered Fred who had just started to get over his dizziness.

"Daphne, Susan, Luna, Neville, and Ginny, please come down and help me revive this lot, along with patching them up if necessary," said Harry and the five individuals that he called descended from the stage. Fortunately, there were no major injuries, there might have been if Harry had used major spells, but a few broken bones and a couple of bloody noses, but nothing more serious than that. All fifteen students returned to their seats and Ginny, Neville, Luna, Susan, and Daphne made their way back to the stage. "Now, the second thing is that you need to know that the biggest threat, the personification of the cancer that has been spread through the outdated principles of the Ministry of Magic is a man known as Tom Marvolo Riddle."

Harry paused, as everyone but Luna, Ginny, Neville, Fred, George, and himself had failed to grasp the significance of that name.

"Now we begin as most stories do, at the beginning, with the Gaunt family, a family that was once most of the most rich and influential pureblood in the world, having directly descended from Salazar Slytherin himself but had fallen in disgrace," said Harry. "Over the years, the family fortune had been blown through and the Gaunts...well they've taken the blood purity thing to a whole another level. This disturbing level of incest lead to generations of inbreeding and insanity destroyed the family, making them the absolute disgrace of the Wizarding World. Their fall from grace occurred over several generations, but by this time, where we pick up with an old hostile

widower named Marvolo Gaunt and his two children, Morfin and Merope, the family's reputation was totally ruined. They lived in a hovel, with only a couple of family heirlooms to their name."

Harry looked at everyone who was curious to see where this story was going.

"Merope had fallen in love with the Squire's son a young man by the name of Tom Riddle, much to the disturbing annoyance of her own brother, who saw it fit to hex the young noble Riddle and once Marvolo found out, he was furious," narrated Harry who had recalled this vividly from all of Voldemort's memories that absorbed into his mind. He spent months going through to piece together the complete story of his enemy's childhood and now he was willing to share this information to the Defense group. Perhaps one day, the world would find out, but only when the time was right. "Merope was a squib for all intents and purposes, caused by the generations of inbreeding and the thought of his daughter having interest in a common Muggle was too much for the old man to bare. He tried to kill her daughter and would have gotten away with it too, had the Aurors not showed up. The Aurors took in the two Gaunt men and Merope was left to her own devices."

A glass of water appeared and Harry took a drink before he carried on.

"Now, sometime in the next couple of years, Merope and Tom Riddle got together, even though you could not find two people who were mismatched than these two, but they were married and Merope was pregnant with child, but something happened that caused Riddle to abandon her when she was a few months away from giving birth," said Harry. "Merope stayed alive only long enough to give birth to her son and name him. Tom after the boy's father, Marvolo after his grandfather. Tom Marvolo Riddle was in an orphanage after the death of his mother and his father never bothered to give him the time a day. Over his childhood, he found that he was different than other children and needless to say, Tommy exploited his abilities to make the other children of the orphanage fear him. Partially because he enjoyed the power he had over him, but also because he did not want

to succumb to any weakness, as he came to the conclusion that his mother died for being too weak.”

Harry looked around as he let that bit of information settle in before he continued to speak.

“Then, a man by the name of Albus Dumbledore showed up and offered Tom in a place called Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, which overjoyed Tom as he had a chance to become even stronger, but Dumbledore obviously had his concerns, although did not follow up on them as much as he should have,” said Harry unable to keep a twinge of irritation out of his voice. “Nearly immediately, he was sorted in Slytherin and began to forge influential friendships. Many because of his naturally charming nature, but more than a few because of intimidation. He also was a very popular young man with the ladies due to his charming nature, but he avoided all romantic information. Young Mr. Riddle had developed a strong distaste for the female sex, he perceived them as weak and not worthy of his attention, because of his mother’s death. He turned to the dark arts, coming to the conclusion that accumulating power was the only thing worthy of his interest, it prevented weakness. Still one thing that interested him was his heritage and through old Daily Prophets, he managed to find a report about a man named Gaunt attacking a Muggle named Riddle. Being the bright young man he was, Tom put two and two together and confronted Morfin Gaunt, who had been released from Azkaban.”

Everyone had their eyes focused on Harry right now, awaiting the next bit of information.

“Tom extracted the truth from his Uncle Morfin, found out that the senior Tom Riddle still lived and moved on to the large manor house that Riddle, who was currently taking care of his elderly parents, had lived in. Tom murdered his father and grandparents in cold blood, to purge the Muggle links to his past, and framed his Uncle Morfin for good measure, using his wand in the murders. Morfin was thrown in Azkaban, without a trial, as he had already had a past in attacking Riddle,” narrated Harry. “On that day, Tom Marvolo Riddle put the next step into his plan. He wanted to become a mysterious, faceless, nearly demonic entity that every witch and wizard would fear, even to

the point that the fear had prevented them from uttering his name. He rearranged his name Tom Marvolo Riddle into...well I'll let actions speak louder than words."

Tom Marvolo Riddle was written in flames in the air before Harry flicked his wand it twisted into I Am Lord Voldemort.

"Tom was You-Know-Who?" gasped a fourth year girl.

"Tom is Lord Voldemort," corrected Harry as most of the people shuddered at Voldemort's name. "Voldemort still walks among us and please don't shudder at his name. Deep inside, Riddle is nothing but an angry little boy who is taking his vengeance out on the world because Daddy abandoned him. Dangerous, yes, powerful, indeed, skilled, absolutely, but don't fear the name itself. Fear what the man behind the name does. At the very least, call him Riddle, because that's who he is, no matter how many hyphenated names he has."

"If you knew he was alive, why didn't you tell the Ministry?" demanded a voice in the crowd.

"Tell the Ministry, that's a good one, get my name utterly torn to shreds like Dumbledore when he foolishly tried to get a group of people to understand that never will and lose all credibility," remarked Harry sarcastically. "Still, I've learned a long time ago that if you want something done right, you have to do it yourself and not wait around for someone else to do it. Especially a Ministry of Magic who is chalked full of politicians that will send innocent men to Azkaban without a trial while allowing wealthy murderers to roam free while patting the new bulge in their robe pocket. While this will be a Defense Against the Dark Arts study group, I am confident that if we all work together, it can evolve into something more. The Wizarding World is long overdue for a change and the time is now. Outdated traditions need to be obliterated. Changes need to occur, the Ministry must be overhauled, so a dark wizard like Voldemort can never rise to power again and lead to the deaths of many good people.

There were many loud cheers in the Room of Requirement.

“Now, unlike a certain so-called Leader of the Light, I’m not going to coddle you. I’m going to admit there is a very real danger out there and you may find yourselves against family members that are too stubborn to admit what needs to be done,” said Harry in a somber voice. “I hope that won’t be the case, but I’m a realist, it is more likely to happen than not. Right now we are going to focus on learning Defense Against the Dark Arts and learning to trust each other. Trust, something that the Ministry of Magic, Order of the Phoenix, or the Death Eaters doesn’t have with each other right now, but that will be the one thing that sets us apart from each other.”

Harry had to talk louder over the sounds of the Room of Requirement just got louder.

“Daphne Greengrass, Luna Lovegood, Neville Longbottom, Susan Bones, Ginny Weasley, and myself will be the leaders of this Defense Association or D.A. for short, that will both serve to teach you vital information that may one day save your life but also serve as the means to help revolutionize the Wizarding World and force changes that are long overdue,” said Harry as he pulled out a cardboard box full of a stack of parchment. “Now before we leave today, I need all of you to sign these contracts. They are magically binding oaths that prohibit you from revealing any information I have given you to anyone outside of this room. Should you return for our second meeting, you have agreed to officially join the Defense Association but if you decide not to, you won’t remember what I’m saying right now or have said previously today.”

Harry paused as Ginny, Daphne, Luna, Neville, and Susan all got up, to make a show of signing the contracts, to prove that everyone was on equal footing. All six of the leaders signed the contracts, before they turned to the crowd in front of them.

“Now who’s with us?” asked Harry and everyone began to walk forward towards the table in front of Harry, without hesitation, to sign a contract one by one.

End of that chapter. That little Hermione scene that might be the most disturbing thing in this story so far. Until I get to Bellatrix’s trip down

memory lane to her childhood that is. **shudders** But that's not for a few more chapters yet.

The Hermione story arc though, boy I have some interesting twists planned for that one but that's a long term thing. Coming up next chapter, some background information on Umbridge, including some insight on her hatred of magical creatures, particularly werewolves, more behind the scenes fun manipulated by Harry, the DA officially begins, Dumbledore and Moody are still on the trail of the traitor, but do they get anywhere remotely near the truth? We might check in with the Minister of Magic as well and Lucius may make a cameo as well. Some other stuff will happen as well, that I can't hint at without giving big spoilers indirectly. Some fluff as well, when I can fit it around that pesky plot thing. :)

Chapter Twenty: Venomous.

When he received the spot as the fifth year boy's prefect, Draco Malfoy expected to be the crown prince of Hogwarts. After all, his father was a high profile advisor of the Minister of Magic and with Dolores Umbridge, another high profile Ministry member with a proper mindset on how the Wizarding World should work, it was likely that he would get full reign to put the Mudbloods and blood traitors in their proper place. Draco reasoned that if Dumbledore was going to do anything to punish him, he would have done so by now. Professor Snape obviously always turned the other way and the other teachers were unwilling to do anything if Dumbledore held their hand every step of the way. It was supposed to be the year that Draco finally had the ability to properly look down at his enemies.

Only, it did not go the way he wanted to. It all started with Harry Potter receiving a prefect badge. Potter had always been able to face him down without backing off, never interested in the reputation that the Malfoy name had through the proper circles in the Wizarding World. In fact, the fact that Potter would always been more noticeable than himself bugged Draco to no end. He had made an attempt to befriend Potter on the train to Hogwarts and a second attempt to befriend him once he cut his ties with the Mudblood and the Weasel. Both times, Potter spurned him and this enraged Draco. What was worse as all of the prefects, with the exception of the upper year Slytherin prefects and of course, Draco, had looked up to Potter as a leader of some sort. It would be one thing if it was just the fifth year prefects, but it was the sixth and seventh year prefects as better. He was nothing but a filthy half blood who got lucky and beat the Dark Lord by a magical fluke.

Yet, what Potter dared to do today enraged Draco even more. With the help of his prefect disciples along with the Head Boy and Girl, he ratified an educational decree so disturbing that it sickened Draco to his stomach. Potter was one sick human being to dare take away this basic human right from the noble, pureblood members of the house of Salazar Slytherin.

"Draco!" shrieked Pansy Parkinson as she moved down the corridor with Crabbe and Goyle who obviously had no idea what was going on

around them. Draco suspected they would forget how to breath without constant reminders “Did you see...that arrogant...he went too far...taking away our rights...”

“I heard, Pansy,” said Draco as he shook his head. “It’s awful, horrible, worse than anything that Dumbledore’s ever done in his life...”

“What?” asked Goyle dumbly.

“You better read it to them, Draco,” responded Pansy as she looked absolutely hysterical and Draco cleared his throat, before he cleared his throat.

Hogwarts Educational Decree Number Twenty Five:

All Hogwarts Students are hereby banned by discriminating any student based on their bloodline or calling them hurtful names based on their bloodline(i.e. Mudblood), will be subjected to disciplinary actions. A three strike policy has been instituted and will follow as such.

First Offense: A month’s detention.

Second Offense: A suspension for the remainder of the school year(or if the school year has less than three months left, the remainder of that year in addition to the following year) and the student will automatically fail before taking over the rest of the year.

Third Offense: The student will be expelled, no exceptions.

Any teachers who are caught not enforcing these acts, will be subjected to be put on probation. Any prefects may lose their badge should they be caught participating in the slander or failing to enforce this Education Decree.

This decree has been mandated due to a disturbing amount of prejudice directed towards Muggleborn students by others and approved by the Hogwarts Junior Inquisitor and has been ratified by the prefects needed. It will officially go into effect November 4th.

Signed,

Harry James Potter, Junior Inquisitor.

Draco looked at the document with disgust as the list of the signatures of all of the Hogwarts prefects were on their, in addition to the Head Boy and Head Girl. He crumpled up the notice that had he had received. It was absolutely putrid that Potter dared to use his fame to champion Mudbloods and now if Draco had put them in their proper place, he could be subjected to disciplinary actions. There was only one thing that he could do.

Draco marched down the corridor, preparing to write a note to his father. Potter would not get away with this at all.

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A couple of days later, Harry had entered the office of the Minister of Magic for one of his routine, semi-regular meetings he had. After a recent generous donation, it appeared like it would be a proper time to drop some hints about a couple of changes to some recently placed legislation that would be beneficial to his plans. As he entered the Minister of Magic office, both Lucius and Fudge sat inside, obviously just having been in the middle of an extremely heated debate.

“Ah Harry, good to see you again, it seems to be too long, but considering your duties as the Junior Inquisitor, you don’t have as much time as you used to drop in on the Ministry,” said Fudge in a jovial voice that did seem a bit forced but as a politician, he was used to putting on a charade. “Not to mention that excellent catch in your Quidditch Match, very good, Harry, you truly proved you were the better seeker.”

Harry barely kept a straight face at Fudge saying this, with the father of the opposing seeker sitting in the room. It appeared that the friendship between Lucius and the Minister of Magic had seen better days. Somehow, Harry felt he was partially responsible for this and made him smile. He was surprised Lucius did not make a play to get Fudge removed, but perhaps that was to come. Harry had his eye on

a couple of candidates that had enough political capital to get themselves slotted into the Ministry of Magic, with a bit of careful planning, once Fudge had outlived his usefulness. He had a handful of contingency plans in place once that moment comes.

“Ah, thanks Minister, you’re too kind, it was a great victory, it’s sad that the Slytherin Quidditch Team has fallen to such standards that they need such sub-par players,” answered Harry. “Good day, to you as well Mr. Malfoy.”

“Mr. Potter,” said Lucius coolly as he stared at Potter without blinking. He was not going to rise to the bait, as the Dark Lord was already not too thrilled with Lucius. Recently, the Dark Lord had found out that Lucius had mishandled the diary and Lucius had got very intimate with the Cruciatus Curse. He still ached from it and it was nearly a week ago when the Dark Lord had found out. Provoking Potter would not earn the Dark Lord. “I must say a recent decision of yours has sparked a great deal of controversy from certain circles in the Wizarding World. That education decree you suggested certainly shook things up and I feel it is my duty to warn you that even someone with your above average talents might not even withstand the vibrations.”

“Harry, I know you have a good reason, but even I must be a bit uneasy for this new revolutionary change to the structure of Hogwarts, I know you want to make for a more positive learning environment, but does these extreme measures seem to be a bit much?” asked Fudge as he looked at Harry, with a curious and slightly uneasy look on his face.

“Actually, I have a very good reason for doing this Minister,” answered Harry and Lucius just looked away to hide the slight shake of his head. “The truth is, there are some purebloods who have ran away with their superiority and their actions, the so called putting those they perceive as less than them that has caused much damage to the Wizarding World. I feel personally there might not be as much resistance to the Ministry of Magic as there is now, if something might have been done to keep this behavior in check. It is not an attempt to restrict pureblood rights, but rather to help them. If pushed too far,

Muggleborn witches and wizards might rebel and it could have serious repercussions for everyone, no matter what blood. “

“Quite an interesting perspective Harry and I feel it would be one that I have to agree with, the last thing we need is mass pureblood massacres by a group of people that have been kicked around too often,” answered Fudge. “Good, very, good, Harry, a most brilliant twist in what is commonly believed to be true.”

“Yes the old families will find out that it will allow them more breathing room, when they realize that not some fanatical Muggleborn or even half blood, might try to eliminate them. In fact, it might cut any attempts for some lunatic to gain power off at the knees, with lack of justification towards any cause,” said Harry as he turned to Lucius with a knowing smile. “Wouldn’t you agree, Mr. Malfoy?”

“You bring quite the interesting perspective to our landscape as usual, Mr. Potter,” responded Lucius coolly as he placed his hands around his walking stick tightly, as if he imagined them going around Harry’s throat and strangling the breath out of him.

“Indeed, Harry, I agree with Lucius, it’s interesting and fresh, especially if it cuts back on the amount of rebellion towards the Ministry, after that unfortunate situation with the Aurors,” said Fudge as he looked at Harry. “Now I believe we got off the subject that you may have initially come here to discuss with me, before we got on this new decree you had created.”

“Astute as usual Minister, if I was old enough, I would vote for you,” said Harry which caused Fudge to chuckle and Lucius to slightly roll his eyes, but Harry pretended not to notice the actions of the elder Malfoy. “Now, I’ve been following the progression of the new Werewolf Registration through the Ministry of Magic and while I fully understand what you’re trying to accomplish, to cut down on werewolf attacks, there are a few parts of it that I’m not sure if it will help the matter. It may only make it worse.”

“Exactly in what way, Harry?” prompted Fudge.

“Well, first of all, I’m not saying that werewolves are cute, cuddly misunderstood creatures, when the fact is that many of them are as just as blood thirsty and violent as people put them out to, but I feel this act may alienate werewolves even further from humanity and the Ministry, to increase the attacks rather than decrease them,” argued Harry. “Causing them to register and force them to spend the night under sedative potions in a highly guarded Ministry facility might only prove to enrage them and increase the attacks. Including putting the families of high ranking Ministry officials in peril, something that I don’t think you want on your watch, Minister.”

“Absolutely not Harry,” said Fudge with a shudder, as he envisioned how fast his political approval rating would drop if such a thing that Harry had mentioned would occur. Even a few high profile werewolf maulings could be disastrous.

“Yet, I’m sure our savior has a viable alternative in mind already,” responded Lucius as he regarded Harry with absolute disdain.

“One has already been invented, the Wolfsbane Potion,” responded Harry. “Once this potion is taken, the savage portion of the werewolf brain is blocked off and I feel that all of those who have the means to get access of the potion, should be encouraged to receive them. However, the previous werewolf laws makes this impossible so perhaps the Ministry could do their part to distribute the Wolfsbane Potion.”

“A novel idea, Mr. Potter, but one that is completely implausible, the cost of the ingredients and the labor of making the potion, would be more than the Ministry can manage,” said Lucius with a smug look, as he thought he had trapped Harry in the corner, but as always, the Boy-Who-Lived would have the last laugh.

“Actually, I’ve calculated, to compare this plan with the one that is detailed in the Werewolf Registration Act, the Wolfsbane Potion plan will cost the Ministry approximately two thousand less galleons per year than the containment facility plan and a lot less deaths as well,” answered Harry as he passed Fudge his notes. “Look for yourself, Minister.”

“Lucius, I’m afraid this is hard economic data that we can’t ignore, I wonder why Dolores did not consider this, it is much more viable to cut back on the werewolf attacks,” said Fudge with a frown, as now with the numbers that Harry had presented him, he realized he would have to increase taxes, never a popular thing. “Thank you for all your hard work on this Harry, you may have saved the Ministry from a colossal blunder.”

“It’s my duty to help in any way I can Minister, I have a feeling this less expensive alternative will be greeted great by the public,” said Harry. “Not to mention that you could find the really dangerous werewolves more easily this way, as they would be the one’s that would not accept the Wolfsbane Potion. They have fallen in too deep and have embraced the savage beast in their subconscious. Those are the one’s that the Ministry really should be concerned about.”

“Quite right Harry, another thing that we had failed to consider, I will take your suggested revisions along to the Wizengamot as soon as possible,” said Fudge. “Not to mention the economic data, to help present an alternative for the original legislation.”

“I’ll let you get on that straight away Minister, I must get back to Hogwarts,” answered Harry.

“I understand perfectly Harry, you have a position that is nearly as overwhelming as the job I have, Dolores looked to be on the verge of a mental breakdown last week,” said Fudge as Harry turned slightly to hide his smile. He knew the reason completely, he had overturned a decree about the High Inquisitor needing to approve all clubs and groups in Hogwarts and one that gave her complete power over deciding all punishments. Thanks to the oath that he tricked Umbridge into signing, all she could do was glare at him nastily, not that she had any help doing that. It was time she realized that she was a long way from the Ministry of Magic and could not bully people into supporting her.

“Well it does have its moments of high stress,” said Harry. “Good bye Minister, I may see you sometime before the holidays.”

“Good bye then to that time Harry,” responded Fudge as he waved Harry off.

“I best go too Minister,” answered Lucius as he followed Harry out. There was a perfect opportunity to eliminate Potter right then and there as he walked down the corridor with his back turned, but Lucius knew he would never get away with it. He remembered what Potter did to no less of a person than the Dark Lord and Lucius doubted that he would walk out of the Ministry with his wand arm intact. In addition, the Dark Lord had left Lucius with clear instructions that he alone would be the one to eliminate Potter.

The werewolf reforms proposed by Potter alarmed Lucius, especially once he realized what the Dark Lord’s reaction was going to be once he found out with. Greyback had gotten his fair share of followers, but there was room for more once this act officially became law. Now Potter ruined it. The Dark Lord was working on a way to force the transformation even outside the full moon and have an army of werewolves under his control to unleash terror on all. Now that army would be reduced because despite propaganda spread, many did suffer and did not enjoy turning into blood thirsty beasts once a month. They would go for the Wolfsbane potion in a heartbeat if it was available for them.

One thing was for certain, the Dark Lord was not going to like this.

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Dolores Umbridge was in her office in a good mood. Her prized legislation, the Werewolf Registration Act would become law any day now. She sat herself down at the desk and read the headline of the Daily Prophet, which caused her mood to turn around completely. In bold there was a headline that caught Umbridge’s attention.

Werewolf Legislation To Be Revised-Initial Plan More Costly to Taxpayers

“Potter,” said Umbridge in disgust as she read the article, written by everyone’s favorite Daily Prophet correspondent Rita Skeeter. As usual, Skeeter took everyone in the Ministry to task, saying that they

were inept to run a government, as they could not figure out the same economic reality that a fifteen year old wizard did. In her article, Rita painted Potter as a heroic maverick, that looked out for the people on the Wizarding world. She also commended him on his recent work as Junior Inquisitor, as he instituted reforms that Dumbledore did not have the guts to put into action. Umbridge suspected Skeeter was on Potter's payroll, but she could not prove it. Still it was odd that Rita had never written a negative word towards Potter, always putting in a good or neutral light. Especially when she went out of her way to destroy the reputations of everyone else that she met.

The Werewolf Registration Act was the next logical step in an entire life's work for Dolores. It was part of her plan to wipe out all of these filthy creatures, but contrary to popular belief in the Ministry, her hatred for werewolves was not the result of blind prejudice unlike some people. In fact, there was a time where Dolores thought of werewolves and all magical creatures worthy of a chance to be equal among humans. That changed one day with a traumatic incident that put Dolores on her current path.

As hard as it was to believe because of her less than appealing appearance, during her time at Hogwarts, Dolores once had a boyfriend. A headstrong, but good natured, young man who saw Dolores for who she was, rather than what she looked like, and they got together during their fifth year at Hogwarts. The young man was a bit of an adventurer and always enjoyed going on exhibitions in the summer. After their seventh year, Dolores and her boyfriend were engaged to be married, but the young man went on one last adventure before he settled down. Into a forest that was known to be crawling with dark creatures and a number of people had went in, but never returned.

Unfortunately, her boyfriend was attacked by a very dangerous werewolf who lived in a shack in the forest. The werewolf had completely removed himself from humanity and lived in the wild, while preying on innocent human beings. The nature of the attack caused the young man's mind to snap and return to kill the werewolf. The bloodlust that he felt when he found when he killed the werewolf who turned him was something that the young man found that he enjoyed. From that day forward, he removed himself from humanity just like

the werewolf who turned him and preyed on the innocent, mostly children, turning them early, to form an army of werewolves to overrun humanity. In the meantime, he formed an alliance with He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named, who promised him an ample supply of people to satisfy his bloodlust.

That was the inspiration for Dolores's work, her noble work to stamp out all werewolves and move on to other half breeds, who were just as dangerous. Mudbloods were on the list as well, their revolutionary thinking threatened to destabilize the perfect balanced world. She slowly took away their rights, which in turn provoked further attacks and then required the Ministry to impose further sanctions against them. This next step was the second to last part in her plan to eliminate the disease by killing each and every werewolf in this country. With his little economically feasible meddling, Potter had ruined over three decades of careful work.

There was not a day that went by that she did not think about what happened to Fenrir and what he became, but now Potter had ruined her noble crusade to prevent it from happening again.

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Harry sat down in the chair, with Ginny right next to him, after the DA meeting. It was only the third meeting, but Harry felt they were making some progress, if it was slow. He watched in the distance, as Daphne, Susan, Luna, and Neville remained behind, along with Daphne's sister Astoria. Harry's plan was to get all of the members to trust each other and work together had begun to take shape. The teamwork exercises needed to completely establish that trust, with Harry slowly integrating a bit of spell work here and there when feasible. Trust was one thing that the other sides out there did not have. The Ministry of Magic and the Order of the Phoenix was in disarray with people looking over their shoulder and at each other suspiciously thanks to Harry's careful planning. As for the Death Eaters, it was painfully obvious that many of them would knock their own mother down a flight of stairs for a bit more power. So it was rather obvious where the trust stood among them.

"So what do you think Harry?" asked Ginny.

"I think we're making decent progress," summarized Harry with a shrug of his shoulders. "Trust is building and teamwork is coming across nicely. Once we get that down pat, then we can kick the spellwork up a notch."

"And exactly when do you judge exactly when we have the trust thing down anyway?" asked Daphne as she regarded Harry with a skeptical expression on her face.

"Trust me, he'll know," answered Luna.

"Yeah, Daphne, he is Harry Potter," replied Susan.

"Right of course, I still haven't figure out how you find out when people are following you in Hogwarts," said Daphne.

"Now, once again, Harry has to keep some things secret," answered Neville.

"Yeah, perhaps one day you're be lucky enough for Harry to give out that trump card, just be patient," said Ginny.

"I'm sure Draco is one person that would want to know too, after what Harry did to him the other day," said Astoria. "Poor Draco, he had to be in the hospital wing for a day, with tentacles growing out of his face."

"Now, Astoria, there's nothing to prove that I'm behind that, but I'm sure Draco was screaming about how he would make Potter pay for this, right?" asked Harry and Astoria nodded unable to hide the smile on her face, despite the misfortune that her crush suffered. "Plus, even if I did attack him, he did deserve it, following me around, in an attempt to attack me for that new decree that has most of the Slytherin house and other students in an uproar."

"Now, Harry, you've had your share of differences with Draco, but deep down, he really is a nice person," said Astoria.

“Exactly how big of a shovel do I need to find how deep down this nice Malfoy is?” asked Harry as Neville, Daphne, Susan, Luna, and Ginny laughed and even Astoria had a slight smile on her face.

“Pretty big Harry, I don’t know if there has been one that has been invented yet,” responded Daphne.

“Draco’s the way he is because he’s eager to live up to his father’s reputation and please him, even though he has big shoes to fill,” said Astoria, as if she was trying to justify Draco’s behavior. “Besides, I think if he had spent less time around Parkinson, he would be a better person all together. All he needs is someone who actually cares about him and he would be better.”

Harry decided not to say anything. Astoria was a bit quieter, more reserved, and less snarky than her older sister, but just about as magically talented and also had the desire just as strong to make a difference. Still, she was blinded her infatuation to Draco and thought she could change Malfoy. He was conditioned by his father to be the arrogant, prejudice bastard that constantly needed to be taken down a peg. Yet, Harry knew he could trust Astoria, because deep in her mind, he found that she could separate her feelings for Draco with the desire to do what needed to be done. The fact she was ambitious enough to do what was necessary was something that Harry admired, even though he did not care much for Astoria’s taste of boys.

“If anyone doesn’t have any concerns that need to be addressed for tonight, Ginny and I will be heading out,” answered Harry and the leaders of the DA shook their heads. From their perspective everything had gone smoothly.

“Everything went well enough, there’s room for improvement, but still good enough for right now,” said Susan.

“They’ll always be room for improvement,” concluded Daphne. “Still even I’d have to admit everything’s going better than the best expectations.”

“Good, excellent, I’ll see you all soon enough and I’ll get the time for the next meeting soon, once I figure out how to best work it into the

schedule,” said Harry as he grabbed Ginny by the hand. “I trust you can find your way back to your Common Rooms.”

“I think we’ll manage,” concluded Susan as the others nodded their heads as Harry and Ginny made their way down to their room in the Chamber of Secrets to enjoy a nice night together. After that intense Quidditch practice, not to mention the extended D.A. meeting, they felt they deserved the night off.

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“Alastor, what’s your progress on your new lead?” asked Dumbledore as Moody looked around, his magical eye whizzing around. Despite the fact that there was no one in the pub but Moody, Albus, and Aberforth, the veteran Auror had known never trust to initial appearances.

“Well Lucius Malfoy frequently is a visitor in the office of the Minister of Magic and thus it would be able for him to bypass all the standard channels of communication, to pass information to him,” said Moody. “That pub that you regularly send Fletcher to obtain information, the Splintered Wand, deep in the deepest, darkest, foulest part of Knockturn Alley, is a dive that Lucius Malfoy frequents a semi-regular basis. I know, strange, a pureblood noble going to a seedy pub but it’s a perfect opportunity to recruit followers for Voldemort. Fletcher, whether it was on his own accord or through drunken stupidity, could have easily given that information to Malfoy who passed it onto Fudge.”

“Mundungus may be a possibility, a long shot, but perhaps someone you could keep an eye on, he has stolen a fair few valuables from the Order headquarters in the past, but thankfully nothing too dangerous,” answered Dumbledore. “Keep an eye on him Alastor, see what you can find out.”

“I intend to, both magical and otherwise, Albus,” said Moody. “Once again, I best depart, but next time, could we stage our meeting at a different place? It’s beginning to get predictable and it leaves us open for an attack if people found out that we were meeting here on a similar regular basis.”

"I'll see what I can manage, Alastor," said Dumbledore. "Until next time, stay under the radar. You're still a wanted fugitive and until the moment where Voldemort is exposed to the world, you must remain vigilante."

"I always do," said Moody gruffly as him and Dumbledore parted ways once again.

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Ginny's head rested on Harry's chest as they laid on the bed in their room in the Chamber of Secrets. Harry remained awake, his arm snaked around Ginny, as he held her tightly, the scent of her hair just inches away from his nose and the touch of her bare skin against his. Just a few hours ago, they had completed the last D.A. meeting of the term and it was the day before the Christmas holidays at Hogwarts. Harry finally had everything ready to have the Aurors cleared, pointing towards brainwashing at the hands of Dumbledore. The plan to get the ring was in place, all it matter was finding enough time to where he could enter the shack and defuse all the magical traps inside, before he moved out. With that, he would worry about the task of removing the Hufflepuff Cup from the Hogwarts vault and then he could eliminate Voldemort for good. Well, in theory at least, Harry had expected that Voldemort would put up a hell of a fight before he eventually was forced into a grave for good, especially without the cushion of the Horcruxes to back him up.

The D.A. was going smooth, even though it was just one component of Harry's long term solution to reshape the Wizarding World. By now he had a good idea who he could keep around in the Ministry and who was easily manipulated to help him achieve his goals for a short time. It was a very short list on the first part and a rather moderate size list on the other hand.

Ginny shifted slightly as Harry began to drift off to sleep. Without her, Harry doubted he would have gotten as far as he could this fast. He may have come to the same conclusions, but Ginny encouraged him to keep to the intended path, never wavering and had helped him tremendously as he shaped the D.A. from a variety of students, into

one part of his newly envisioned Wizarding World. Others had and would still play their role, but none greater than Harry and Ginny. They would lead everyone into a new age, while they erased the mistakes of the past. These thoughts were the last in Harry's mind as he drifted off for an untroubled night of sleep with no strange dreams of any kind.

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Nagini slithered into the outside corridor around the Department of Mysteries, the great serpent who poked her head from side to side. Her master, the great Lord Voldemort, had entrusted her with this task to catch a closer look at the security that the Department offered. His human followers were rather pitiful and thus inept to perform this important task. Thanks to the ritual her master performed on her, Nagini had increased intelligence and always had a part of the Dark Lord in her to guide her.

The snake stopped as she heard something nearby. A human, middle aged, underneath an Invisibility Cloak, close, guarding the door, the one obstacle against her entering the Department of Mysteries but one that was easily eliminated. The fool did not even have his wand in hand as if a mere Invisibility Cloak would be enough to protect him.

Arthur Weasley stood underneath the Invisibility Cloak as he yawned. In another half of an hour his shift was up and he wanted nothing more to get home. Abruptly he turned at an angry hiss and before he could reach for his wand, a pair of fangs sunk into the right arm of Arthur. He dropped to the ground face first, the Invisibility Cloak still covering him. He felt his body get numb as the venom from the fangs of the snake had quickly spread through his body and he was too weak to even lift the Cloak off him.

"Help me!" shouted Arthur loudly but it was obvious that no one had heard him. He tried to force out another desperate shout of help, as he doubted that he had much time left before he had been completely poisoned. "Someone, if anyone's there, help me!"

No one, not even a footstep or a movement outside, as Arthur could not even keep his head up for more than a few seconds. Every nerve

ending in his body began to shut down and he began to have difficulty breathing.

“SOMEONE PLEASE!” shouted Arthur in one last burst of desperation, to force one final plea, but he collapsed to the ground, as he could feel his throat slowly close up. He forced one final feeble plea out before his throat he completely swelled itself shut from the venom. “Anyone, I’m dying, help, please someone...”

Arthur’s world around him had gone black around him before he could finish his plea of help, as the vital functions of his body slowly shut down one by one.

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Albus Dumbledore sat in his office, a bit of concern in his features. Arthur Weasley had not returned home last night and he received a frantic message from Molly just this morning. Dumbledore had a couple of people look into what happened to Arthur but he feared the worse. A bright silver light in the shape of an iguana appeared.

“We found Arthur Weasley, it is as you had feared Albus,” said the Patronus Messenger gravely. “Poisoned, his throat was swelled up and all of his organs were dissolved by the venom of a magical serpent. At least eight hours since he was bitten, I’m off to spin this.”

Dumbledore now had the unfortunate task of informing Molly and the elder Weasleys of the news. He sent a note to Minerva to inform the Weasleys at Hogwarts to come to his office at the earliest convenience.

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“Ready for the holidays Harry?” asked Ginny, as they exited their room in the Chamber of Secrets.

“I’m more than ready, that plan of yours to make your mother think you were staying at Hogwarts as part of your duty as Hogwarts prefect,” said Harry as he smiled at his girlfriend’s brilliance.

“When in reality I’m going to you to spend the holidays with Sirius, so I can help you with those plans that we worked on over the past couple of months,” offered Ginny.

“Brilliant, no wonder we’re together,” said Harry before they exchanged a kiss. Each time they touched, they felt warmth and power beyond anything else, it was pure bliss. After a couple of minutes, they slowly pulled apart, as they looked in each other’s eyes intently, before Ginny managed to break the silence.

“Indeed we compliment each other greatly, on a number of fronts,” said Ginny, as she gripped Harry’s hand as they walked down the corridors. “Since Dobby already sent our luggage ahead, all we have to do is activate our portkeys and we’re there in a heartbeat.”

Harry nodded as they moved down the corridor to have a quick Breakfast for they took off to implement their plans but they ran into a very stressed looking Professor McGonagall.

“Miss Weasley, thank heavens I managed to catch you, something has happened....Professor Dumbledore will explain it in his office, but we need to move quickly before certain people see us,” said McGonagall as she looked at Harry. “I think you best come too as well Mr. Potter.”

Ginny and Harry looked at each other. They had never saw McGonagall this upset before and immediately, they were clued in that something bad happened. Harry and Ginny stuck close to each other as a distracted and distressed McGonagall lead them towards Dumbledore’s office. A horrible number of possibilities flowed through their minds.

“Sugar Quill,” said McGonagall in a shaky voice as the gargoyle sprang open and Harry and Ginny entered Dumbledore’s office. They followed McGonagall as she opened the door and entered the office. Inside, they saw Ginny’s brothers, with the exception of Percy, who all looked rather grave, along with Mrs. Weasley who looked like she was in shock. Harry placed his arm around Ginny, as both of them had come to the same conclusion at the same time but Dumbledore turned to them to officially confirm their dark suspicions.

“Miss Weasley and Mr. Potter as well, I’m afraid there is no easy way of saving this,” said Dumbledore in a saddened tone of voice. “Arthur Weasley passed away early this morning after being poisoned by the venom of a snake that is known to belong to Lord Voldemort.”

Chapter Twenty One: Fugitive

Hearing the news out loud did not seem to make it even more plausible. Ginny's eyes widened for a moment, if she did not believe what she was hearing, before Harry wrapped his arms around her, before he pulled her in tightly, as she was shaking slightly and Dumbledore stood there, as if he was struggling to find the right thing to say in this situation, if there was a right thing to say. Harry looked at Ginny, who was shattered at the loss of her father and angry at Dumbledore. To be fair, she was not the only Weasley in this room that was not happy with this, as Fred, George, and Bill were all shooting nasty looks at the Headmaster right about now as Charlie and Ron both balled up their fists. Molly on the other hand, looked at the ceiling, catatonic, in shock.

"For what it's worth, I'm sorry it had to happen this had to happen," offered Dumbledore which snapped Molly out of her state and Ginny turned slightly, she still held tightly to Harry's arm.

"Sorry, you're sorry, Dumbledore?" demanded Molly as she shakily got to her feet. "That's all you can offer after you basically lead Arthur to his death. Do you think sorry is going to bring Arthur back? Do you think you can just wave away this mistake you made with a few words and a twinkle in your eye?"

"Molly, I understand and sympathize with your grief, but at the same time, we can't be allowed to be lead to dissension because of this tragedy," said Dumbledore. "Voldemort wants this, he uses this to divide us, we must not be distracted from the bigger picture..."

"FUCK YOU AND YOUR BIGGER PICTURE ALBUS DUMBLEDORE!" shouted Molly angrily. "If it wasn't for your vague assumptions about something that You-Know-Who might be after, when you haven't been entirely clear to the Order of the Phoenix what exactly this weapon is. How can we trust you when you can't trust us enough to give us all of the information? This isn't the first time you've gotten someone killed but I refuse to stand by. It was supposed to be safer than last time, but it's just as dangerous if not more so. Now Arthur's dead and all you can offer for an explanation is that you're sorry. You owe us the reason why he risked his life."

"That is impossible Molly, if this falls in the wrong hands, it could be a disaster," said Dumbledore and here Harry resisted the urge to roll his eyes. Once again, there was Dumbledore, overstating the importance of the Prophecy. Ginny had her head buried into his shoulder but her hand was shaking. Harry grabbed Ginny's hand tightly, in an attempt to comfort her.

"Of course, Dumbledore, I shouldn't have believed any less than you, you're no better than You-Know-Who," spat Molly angrily.

"I'm sorry you feel that way, Molly," responded Dumbledore, who saw the Order of the Phoenix crumbling before his eyes. There were things he did not understand himself, he had assumed because of the connection between Voldemort and Harry and Voldemort's subsequent connection with the snake in question, Harry should have saw the incident as it happened. Perhaps the connection was not as Dumbledore had thought, he would have to have Severus investigate it more thoroughly.

"I'm sure you do, Dumbledore," responded Molly scathingly. "Right now, I quit the Order of the Phoenix and I hope my children have the sense to do the same."

"Molly, do reconsider, I don't think you're being rational, blinded by your grief," said Dumbledore but Molly had already left the office, both angry and sobbing at the loss of her husband.

"Professor Dumbledore, I've always respected you and given you the benefit of the doubt for some rather questionable situations," said Bill as he finally found his voice. "Right now, I don't know if I could ever trust you again and I know for a fact I can't under good conscience continue to be in the Order of the Phoenix. I'm going to hand in my resignation right now."

Dumbledore was alarmed as he watched Bill Weasley walk out of the room. Getting the goblins either on their side or to adopt a policy of neutrality was crucial. If they joined Voldemort, all would be lost and Dumbledore was relying on Bill to make that happen. As he watch the

eldest Weasley leave, Dumbledore watched another one of his well placed had dissolved right into nothingness.

"I have to agree with Bill as well, Professor Dumbledore," added Charlie. "You reassured us nothing bad would happen, and now Dad paid for your error in judgment. I just hope you don't lead anyone else to their death."

Dumbledore watched Charlie leave the office, as he wondered exactly how this day could get any worse. Fred, George, and Ron could not even bring themselves to words, but they gave Dumbledore one final nasty glare before they departed, which left Harry and Ginny alone in the office with Dumbledore, who looked every one of his over one hundred years. After a moment, Harry decided to speak up.

"It looks like you have a lot to do, so we'll just get out of your way, Professor Dumbledore," answered Harry in a force calm voice that Dumbledore obviously misinterpreted for genuine.

"Indeed, Harry, more than you could ever imagine," muttered Dumbledore as Harry got this feet before he lead Ginny, who wiped her face with the sleeve of her robe, before they made their way to the Room of Requirement. Arthur Weasley's unfortunate death had thrown a spanner into their fun holiday plans and of all the people who deserved to die, Arthur was at the very bottom of that list. Hell, he was way below the list. Harry was glad the rest of the Weasleys wised up to the dangerous game Dumbledore was playing. It was a shame that such a good man had to be sacrificed to make that happen.

Dumbledore remained in his office, relieved that Harry and Ginny had not turned on him like the others had. As long as he had those two, his plans would be safe. Sure there was grief and a bit of anger at the situation, but nothing as blatant as the five Weasley brothers and Molly Weasley. Dumbledore hoped they would reconsider. They were all valuable assets to his plan.

Unfortunately, it would be even more problematic to find people who would willingly guard the prophecy. The Aurors getting arrested had lead to a problem and as much as he liked to say it was different,

Dumbledore was no closer to solving that mystery. Now, there would be even fewer people who would be willing to stick their necks out for something that Dumbledore only gave them basic information. Still, he was unwilling to give more specifics out about the prophecy. There was always the possibility that he could have Harry remove it from the Department of Mysteries, but that would require Dumbledore to tell Harry about the prophecy, something that he was not willing to do just yet. Along with the fact that Dumbledore still needed the prophecy as bait to lure Voldemort out in the open, to make the Minister believe that he had returned.

While Dumbledore was saddened to a slight extent what happened to Arthur Weasley, there were other problems that would present themselves in the not so distant future. This would only serve to weaken the Order further, beyond the Weasleys, Dumbledore could only begin to guess whatever people would quit the Order of the Phoenix because of this accident. People would get scared and fear for their lives, it was too long since Dumbledore had to deal with these uncomfortable truths. When the Order of the Phoenix had made progress, it was because of the efforts of the members. When there were failures, the members turned the blame towards Dumbledore. With that in mind, Dumbledore could not remember an incident that had so many horrific ramifications.

Even with that in mind, there was the matter of how the Minister of Magic interpreted this incident and Dumbledore made plans to flee quickly to a safe house had prepared for such an incident if the worse case scenario came to pass.

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Cornelius Fudge made his way into his office, as the entire Ministry was in an uproar, after the body of one of their Ministry employees was found just outside the entrance for the Department of Mysteries. From all reports, it was a ghastly sight, but they managed to identify the body as Arthur Weasley, the father of his Junior Assistant Percy Weasley and a long time employee of the Ministry.

Fudge sank down on the chair behind his desk. Rufus was in the process of conducting a full investigation on the area around Weasley

and looked for any clues that would indicate the culprit. Already the Daily Prophet got a hold of the information and painted the picture of a scandal with a Ministry employee dying on their property after hours. Even during the time of He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named it was unheard of. Fudge felt he had to act quickly, otherwise his reputation might be destroyed along with this scandal. If he acted quickly and caught the culprit behind this or at least someone who could be fingered as the culprit based on the evidence he found, his career would be saved. At this moment, the Daily Prophet would be finding its way into the homes of many and Rita Skeeter would have already added her own unique two cents on the deal.

“Minister,” said the voice of Rufus Scrimgeour and Fudge turned to the side where the fireplace was. He knelt down to see his Head Auror in the fire. “We’ve scoured the area, nothing that can be used to identify the attacker physically, but we did find a very interesting note on Arthur Weasley’s person.”

“What is it, Rufus?” asked Fudge, who hoped this could be the piece of evidence that he needed to breathe just a bit more easier.

“It’s a list of times where Arthur was to be outside of the Department of Mystery corridors,” said Scrimgeour. “It says its for the Order...perhaps Order of the Phoenix?”

“Yes, that might do the trick, I see what you’ve done now Dumbledore, you’ve been sending people to nose around in the Department of Mysteries,” muttered Fudge as if he was piecing together some extraordinary scheme. “Obviously, you were trying to figure out what was inside, so you could steal it and perhaps equip your army with weapons, to overthrow me. Weasley must have found out too much and might have disagreed with you, so you set him up, poisoned him and left him for dead. Covered your tracks but not well enough, Dumbledore.”

“Minister?” prompted Scrimgeour in an uncertain voice. “Are you saying that Albus Dumbledore was behind Arthur Weasley’s death?”

“I’m positive, Rufus,” answered Fudge, he had been looking for something to put away Dumbledore ever since he started spreading

that nonsense about You-Know-Who. While the handling of Harry Potter and Secret Keeper fiasco were damning evidence, it was not enough to put someone with Dumbledore away. Now with a murder charge over his head, Dumbledore would be put into Azkaban and maybe if the Minister had his way, get a little kiss as well.

“So do you want me to give the word?” asked Scrimgeour and there was a moment’s pause before the Minister nodded, a determined, intense look on his face.

“Yes, Rufus, take a team of your best Aurors to Hogwarts and bring Dumbledore in for his part in the murder of Arthur Weasley,” responded Fudge. “Bring him in alive if possible, but if he is killed in the struggle, then it is what must be done. Regardless of how, Dumbledore needs to be brought down because his recent mental stability in believing You-Know-Who is alive is harming himself and others. I fear old age has finally taken the mind of Albus Dumbledore and these delusions could be a danger to the students of Hogwarts. Take as many Aurors as you need, but bring him in or take him down. That’s my order, Rufus.”

“As you wish, Minister,” said Scrimgeour as his face disappeared from the fire. Fudge rose to his feet, to write a letter to the Weasleys, offering his condolences for the death of Arthur Weasley and to offer his help if they needed anything in this time of need.

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“Ginny, I don’t know what to say,” said Harry as they were in the Room of Requirement, sitting on a couch, with Ginny’s head in Harry’s lap, as she clutched the latest addition of the Daily Prophet, her father’s death the front page story.

“This is exactly the reason why we should keep doing what we’re doing!” shouted Ginny hysterically. “Dad wouldn’t have died if he didn’t have that blind trust for Albus Dumbledore. You saw Dumbledore, he said he was sorry but he wasn’t, he just saw Dad as another sacrifice, for this plan he has. Dad didn’t matter to him and he just happened to be there when that happened!”

"I know, Ginny, its unfortunate and your father will be missed. In fact take as much time to recover as you need to before we continue with the plan, I just never expected something like this to happen," responded Harry as he brushed her hair away from her face and looked up. Arthur Weasley was one of the few adults that he had ever respected. He might have been a bit blinded by Dumbledore and a bit whipped by his wife, but Arthur Weasley was truly a harmless man, who would never deceive anyone, would never hurt a fly. Besides he had been up front with him about the Sirius thing, despite the Minister not wanting him too. Even though Sirius turned out to be innocent, Harry still respected Arthur's honesty of telling information that Harry needed to know. That was more he could say for certain other people named Albus Dumbledore.

"No, Harry, we can't let this distract us, I'm upset that Dad died, but for that reason, we can't fall behind, every day Dumbledore and Voldemort are allowed to run free, is another day that more innocent people just like him die," said Ginny in a firm voice, who refused to let her father's death, no matter how bad it affected her, get in the way of what had to be done.

"If you're sure Ginny, I don't want to force you back into this before you had time to grieve," responded Harry and Ginny looked at him, a focused look in her eyes, even though they looked slightly red, she was determined to not let this tragedy set her back. "I just wish that...well I can't help but shake that if the connection between myself and Voldemort hadn't been destroyed, I might have been able to..."

"Stop it right there, Harry" responded Ginny who had an idea where this was going and wanted to cut Harry off at the pass before it happened.. "We've already more or less figured out that connection was nothing but trouble. The Horcrux had to have been slowly killing you, after what we've read about them in the Black library and the theories about. Who's to say that Dad wouldn't have already been dead by the time he was found? It says in the article he was covered in the Invisibility Cloak, so it would have take a miracle to find him before the venom completely poisoned him. I know you wished it wouldn't have happened but it is too late now."

"Yes, Ginny, still wished it wouldn't have happened," answered Harry.

"We're alike in that regard then," answered Ginny, as she sat up, while she looked at Harry. "It's just will be hard to realize that he's gone and I don't even know if it's fully hit me yet...but I'll recover."

"I know you will Ginny, you're strong, it's tough but you will get through this," answered Harry. "Now I think we better meet up with the rest of your family, according to the map, they're in McGonagall's office."

Ginny nodded numbly, as her and Harry left the Room of Requirement, before they got under the Invisibility Cloak. Neither of them wished to encounter anyone in the hallways right now.

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In his office, Dumbledore had completed packing away all of his most important possessions along with the memories that detailed what he managed to piece together about Voldemort's rise to power. If the Ministry managed to find a way into the office, there were items that they could not be allowed to find, it would raise too many questions why they were there in the first place. Dumbledore placed the box inside one of his robe pockets and he heard shouting outside.

"What grounds are you here!" shouted the voice of Minerva McGonagall. "You should have a warrant, you can't just barge into a school whenever you want, based on some suspicion."

"Sorry, Minerva, but I'm just following the orders of the Minister of Magic, step aside, unless you want to be brought up on charges of aiding a fugitive," said the voice of Rufus Scrimgeour as he moved forward. "My men have orders to blast down the door and if that includes destroying the guardian of the Headmaster's office, then so be it."

"Allow them in," muttered Dumbledore to the door of his office, who did not wish to have Minerva do something that he regretted. She was needed at Hogwarts to help hold everything steady. While Harry's role as Junior Inquisitor would be good, there was only so much Harry could do against an accomplished politician like Dolores

Umbridge. She had decades of experience that even Harry, as bright as he had become recently, would be no match for. At that moment, Rufus and a squadron of seven Aurors made their way, wands drawn. "Ah, Rufus, it's been too long. Might I ask why you are here?"

"Albus Dumbledore, you are under arrest because you are suspected to have a role in the murder of Arthur Weasley," said Scrimgeour in a business like tone, as his Aurors held their wands steady, pointed directly towards Dumbledore if he had tried any sudden maneuvers. "You are to come slightly and surrender your wand. If you refuse, the Minister of Magic has authorized us to use force to bring you in."

Dumbledore remained still, before he stepped out behind the desk slowly as if to surrender. If it was any other Auror but Rufus in charge, they would enter the office, with stunning spells flying and ask questions later. The fact that Rufus was by the book would allow Dumbledore the perfect opportunity to escape.

"Just step forward nice and easy Dumbledore, lay your wand at our feet and there will be no need for an incident," said Scrimgeour in a gruff voice and Dumbledore bent forward, wand at the ready but in a blink of an eye, an orange orb shot out of the wand. The orb exploded, to fill the office with a blinding light, that Dumbledore shielded his eyes from the blinding lights with the sleeves of his robes.

"I can't see a thing!" shouted one of the Aurors obviously as he tried to rub his eyes but this gesture failed.

"Shoot your stunning spells, we can't allow him to leave!" shouted Scrimgeour, even though he was unable to tell whether he would have aimed at Dumbledore or his own Aurors.

Dumbledore moved forward, as Fawkes stood at the ready. Quickly, Dumbledore held on and as the light began to clear, he disappeared with a flash of flames. The Aurors staggered around and were enraged when they realized Dumbledore had given the slip.

"Everyone move, he couldn't have gone far," ordered Scrimgeour and the Aurors moved from the hallway, which was completely empty by now. Scrimgeour refused to give up this easily, he hated to fail at

capturing a fugitive of the law and right now, if Dumbledore was allowed to go on the run, it might be months before they could even pick up the trail to find an accomplished wizard like Dumbledore, even if he was becoming a bit mentally unstable due to his constant belief that He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named was alive.

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"So, basically Arthur died because he was just there," summarized Sirius with a sigh, as Harry had returned to Number Twelve Grimmauld Place. Remus was also in the kitchen.

"Now, Dumbledore's going to be raked over the coals for what happened, if Fudge finds anything that remotely tying him to what happened to Arthur, I doubt he would hesitate to bring him in," said Remus. "This means that Umbridge might find herself in the role as Hogwarts Headmistress..."

"No she won't, trust me, I've prepared for this since the moment I've become Junior Inquisitor," said Harry in an off handed voice as he reflected on the last couple of hours. Arthur Weasley's death had been a shock to say the least. Ginny had returned to the Burrow with the rest of the family, with Molly's insistence and Harry agreed. Besides, they could still be together at night, using the portkeys, and no one would be the wiser. It was best to make Molly Weasley think she was getting her way. Harry also made arrangements for himself to pay for the funeral of Arthur Weasley, but in a way where it would be done anonymously with only him and Ginny knowing about it. Molly would fight him tooth and nail about the gold otherwise. It was best for her to think the Ministry had done it, because he knew that Fudge would take the credit anyway.

"Exactly what do you have planned Harry?" asked Sirius curiously

"Now, Sirius, everyone will know, well except the prefects who voted it in obviously, when it happened, but I did figure that Fudge would remove Dumbledore for quite some time and Umbridge would try to slide into the Head spot, to give her even more power," said Harry as he knew this act would both undermine Umbridge once again and also increase this trust Dumbledore had for him. No matter what

happened, Dumbledore would return, he was not one to slink off into the night easily as many in the Ministry thought he would.

Right now, he had mentally made a few adjustments to his plans for the holidays. Two of the plans had to be pulled off right now, a couple of the other minor ones could wait. With the decoy ring completed, it would be foolish to wait around too much more to retrieve that particular Horcrux and destroy it.

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Percy Weasley was at his flat in London. He had heard about the death of his father by now and he was angry at the reason it had to happen. While he was not going to go out and claim that Dumbledore murdered his father like the Minister of Magic was saying, his father's blind trust towards Dumbledore and Dumbledore's ability to put people in danger for some misguided "greater good" had lead to this tragedy. Percy was saddened that it happened, but not surprised. His father never took his words to heart about Dumbledore leading them all to their deaths and now this happened.

Truthfully, Percy was always a bit suspect in trusting Dumbledore. During his sixth year, with his sister nearly being killed in the Chamber of Secrets fiasco, Percy knew Dumbledore was not the great wizard that the world had hyped him up as. He had defeated Grindelwald and had become allegedly one of the greatest Headmasters in Hogwarts history, but exactly how much of this was truth? There was no way to prove or disprove the battle with Grindelwald, as all of the details had been lost to history, other than the fact Dumbledore had defeated him. As for the greatest Hogwarts headmaster, the average marks for the entire school had dipped from the previous five Heads. Not a significant amount, but the records were there for someone who had the time to dig deep enough. And there were more than a few questionable teachers that Dumbledore hired during his time that set off alarm bells in Percy's mind.

Still, the fact that a trio of second year students managed to solve a mystery that Dumbledore, the alleged greatest wizard of his time, could not caused Percy to wonder where exactly the old man's head was. He was one of two things. One, he was good at maintaining a

charade of being good, but really most of his achievements were based on coincidence and luck and charismatic enough to make others follow his delusions. As a result, he had not pieced together what was going on with Ginny. Secondly, he was as good as he said and managed to piece together the mystery, but had kept it a secret to test Harry, no matter how much it put Ginny's life in peril. Given what Percy had learned about Dumbledore as of late, especially what was revealed in the infamous Black trial, he would not be surprised at the least with anything Dumbledore did. If that second theory he had was true, then Ginny was very lucky that she did not pay for her life because of Dumbledore's games.

His father on the other hand was not as lucky and Percy hoped that Dumbledore would be brought to justice before more innocent people paid for his crimes.

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"Rise, Lucius," responded the cold voice of Lord Voldemort as Lucius Malfoy knelt down before him. "This had better be worth interrupting my research efforts."

"It is, my Lord," said Lucius, who had hoped this would put the Dark Lord in a good mood. After Potter had railroaded the werewolf legislation, Lucius had lost a lot of credibility with his in fact. In fact, the Dark Lord hinted that the only reason that Lucius was allowed to remain alive for his failures is because the plans to break the Dark Lord's followers currently in Azkaban had not been fully put into motion yet. "Albus Dumbledore has been charged with the murder of Arthur Weasley."

Lord Voldemort responded with a round of high cold laughter. While this was not his intention, he had framed one of his great enemies and truly this was an excellent bonus, despite the fact Nagini had not brought him any further news at what he had to deal with to get the prophecy. Once Rookwood was broken out of Azkaban, perhaps he would make some progress on this scheme.

“Amusing, a member of one of the most famous family of Dumbledore supporters, someone that Dumbledore is accused of murdering,” said Voldemort softly.

“Indeed, my Lord, the Ministry has put out a thirty five hundred galleon reward on any information that lead to Dumbledore’s capture and he will receive the Dementor’s Kiss when he is caught,” said Lucius. “I’d imagine that once Dumbledore is finished, we will be able to move forward for our plans.”

“There is still Harry Potter,” said Voldemort, amused that Lucius had deluded himself into thinking he was an equal to Lord Voldemort.

“Potter, I doubt a child could be much of a threat to you, my Lord,” answered Lucius but Voldemort looked at him coldly and raised the wand that had been created by his connections in Albania to replace the one that Potter had stole. This wand still felt off, as it was created by a black market dealer, as opposed to a professional like Ollivander, but still Voldemort was great enough to make any wand, no matter how ill-suited, work for him.

“Crucio,” said Voldemort coldly and Lucius screamed in pain. He had been on the receiving end of this curse more times then he cared to remember in the past and even the fifteen seconds the Dark Lord held him under seemed like an eternity. Lucius dropped to the ground and Voldemort stared at him, without even blinking. “Do not patronize me, Lucius. Is that clear?”

“Yes, my Lord,” said Lucius as he could barely stand due to the pain.

“Leave me,” ordered Voldemort and Lucius left. The fool most likely had never realized what he did. He had insulted the Dark Lord’s power by discounting Potter has a non-threat. After the outcome of their latest confrontation, Lucius should have known better than to insult Lord Voldemort.

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Nymphadora Tonks sat in her cell in Azkaban, hating life or more particularly, Albus Dumbledore. For almost five months, she sat in

this cell, along with five of her fellow Aurors nearby. They had all been accused of treason towards the Ministry of Magic. Dumbledore assured they would not be compromised, but when she arrived at the Ministry on that faithful day, she was forced at wand point onto a Portkey that sent her on a one way trip to Azkaban prison. She was not the only one, as five other Aurors had been sent to Azkaban, all based on hard evidence given to Fudge and Scrimgeour by a mysterious informant. The informant was not what made Tonks mad the most, but rather the fact that Dumbledore did nothing to get them out of Azkaban. Despite all of the propaganda spun by Fudge, Dumbledore had more than a few people that would easily agree to put pressure to give the Aurors a fair trial and perhaps explain the evidence.

If by some miracle she got out of here, Tonks vowed she would quit the Order of the Phoenix once and for all. She had a few misgivings before the incident, what Sirius told her about how Dumbledore sent Harry to the Dursleys and never checked up on him disturbed her. The only reason she agreed to join in the first place was because of the belief that Voldemort was back and the fact that the Ministry would not do anything, even if proof was shoved under their noses. As she joined the Order of the Phoenix, she regretted it every day.

Not to mention that based on all of the news that reached the island, that ever since he ascended to the Junior Inquisitor position at Hogwarts, Harry had proven to be more progressive and much more of a positive influence on the school than Dumbledore had been during his decades as Headmaster. Quite frankly, Tonks was intrigued by Harry and she had a feeling there was something more to who the Daily Prophet dubbed "The Golden Maverick" that met the eye. It was just a feeling that she had.

"Nymphadora Tonks," said a voice and Tonks looked up. There was a chance this was a hallucination based on having too much exposure to the Dementors. Many had gone mad in this time but a group of Aurors appeared outside of her cell, one that used his wand to rearrange the runes around the door in the proper pattern to allow it to dissolve away. "You have been acquitted of all charges by evidence given to the Wizengamot by its newest representative. It is believed that Albus Dumbledore had brainwashed you and you fellow

Aurors to join up with his Order of the Phoenix. You are to sign a document that states you understand this belief but once that is done, you are free to leave, no questions asked.”

Tonks hardly believed her luck. She followed the Aurors outside the door. The Dementors were in the shadows but the Patroni at the front kept them to the shadows. Exactly who got this information to the Ministry that got her cleared or what it was, Tonks really did not know or care. All she knew was she was getting out of Azkaban, just in time for Christmas.

A door to a small office area off to the side of the prison that was better maintained than the rest of the prison was opened and the Aurors escorted her in, where there was a hooded figure inside the office. The hooded figure slid the document, a bottle of ink and a quill towards her.

“Please sign this and then you’ll have your freedom, Nymphadora,” said a familiar sounding voice and Tonks sat down, she took the parchment and carefully read the contents. Reading something before signing it had been a strange and foreign concept to the pureblood magical society, but her father, a Muggleborn, had always lectured Tonks about reading anything she signed. As she read it, there were several terms in it that might have been a cause for concern, but really fit in well with her own agenda. She had no problems with never aligning herself with Albus Dumbledore or joining the Order of the Phoenix anyway. Also, even though she would have done it for free, it was a nice bonus working for this person as he would pay double than the annual Auror salary. As she looked it over, everything appeared fine and curiosity did overwhelm her, as she lifted her quill and signed her name to the parchment, before she slid it back towards the hooded figure. “I must say, you were the only person who bothered to read it. The others were too pleased that when they found out they were now working for me, but there was nothing they could do. Magically binding oath, nothing around that, but I think they’ll find me fair and won’t leave them hanging for all of those months like Dumbledore did.”

“Well, it’s their fault for not reading it,” responded Tonks with a shrug. “It’s a lesson they need to learn the hard way.”

"Indeed, this Portkey will take you straight home," said the hooded figure.

"Thanks, Harry," responded Tonks but the hooded figure did not even flinch at the revelation that she knew who he was. "I'm curious to exactly what you're up to."

"Soon enough, Nymphadora," said the Harry as he ignored the scowl on her face. He was not intimidated; he had faced Voldemort after all. "Merry Christmas."

"Merry Christmas, Harry," said Tonks as she looked at her new employer one more time before she took the Portkey. No doubt her parents would be pleased.

As for Harry, he needed to get back and remove the sleeping charm from the Ministry aide he replaced to get the support of the recently released Aurors. With a slight memory modification, it would be like he was there the entire time and no one would know the difference.

Tomorrow he had to attend the funeral of Arthur Weasley, but after that a quick meeting with the other members of the Wizengamot to be officially sworn in for his seat and then onto the fifth Horcrux of Tom Riddle, the ring.

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Harry returned to the room late that next day, wearing dragon hide gloves, reinforced with protection charms, as he held the ring tightly. Had he not know about the protections around the ring from Voldemort's memories, it would not have ended well. The moment he had dug the ring out, he was visited with a strange compulsion to put it on, that he shrugged off, before he replaced the original ring with the decoy. The decoy had a similar curse on it like the original, but the death would be slower and more painful. Not to mention the fact that it had to be triggered by another component that Harry still had to place where Voldemort still believed the locket to be.

As Harry prepared the containment area for the destruction for the Horcrux, his mind reflected back to the Arthur Weasley funeral. It was a somber and rather crowded affair with Weasleys from all over the world, along with many Minister employees, that included the Minister of Magic himself among other notable employees. Harry only stayed long enough to pay his respects, before he told Ginny he would see her later and departed. The last thing he wanted was a funeral being turned into a media fiasco by his presence.

He had the ring in the box, as he removed the vial of Basilisk venom. He tapped his wand to it, as he put a time delay release on the anti-dissolving charms, before he placed it inside a glass case and sealed it shut. He watched as the basilisk venom leaked through, as a black shadow was pulled from the ring. A loud shriek echoed in the box and the basilisk venom oozed, as the shadow was ripped apart slowly. Harry stepped forward and the sight that greeted him surprised him.

Despite the fact that the Horcrux had been destroyed, the ring was still intact. Harry blinked, it was strange, basilisk venom was supposed to destroy anything that it touched, even with the strongest protective charms. The fact that it was able to destroy the Horcrux proved that, yet why did it not destroy the ring?

There was something strange about this ring, even more so than it had just contained a piece of Voldemort's soul and Harry intended to find out what.

Chapter Twenty Two: Hallows.

Dolores Umbridge made her way down the corridors of Hogwarts in a jovial mood. For one, it was a nice, quiet holiday season away from annoying whiny brats and she also had a chance to take some time off to be away from the students at Hogwarts as well. Not to mention that Albus Dumbledore was now on the run from the Ministry of Magic with a thirty five hundred galleon price on his head and the orders by the Minister of Magic himself. That meant there was no longer a Headmaster position for Hogwarts and it would be the perfect opportunity to achieve her goal of becoming the Hogwarts Headmistress. Dolores prepared to go to her office to draft a decree to get herself established in the proper power position before the holidays had concluded, but her attention was caught by a notice. It appeared to be another education decree, posted by the Hogwarts Junior Inquisitor. Umbridge leaned in to take a close look and what she saw angered her.

Hogwarts Education Decree Number Twenty Nine:

Due to the untimely departure of Albus Dumbledore from Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, the position of the Hogwarts head has been left vacant. To determine the vacancy, Harry Potter, the Junior Inquisitor, has determined the most senior living staff member and deputy Headmistress Minerva McGonagall succeed Dumbledore, to become the new Hogwarts Headmistress. This decree has been introduced by the Hogwarts Junior Inquisitor Harry Potter and approved by the required number of prefects. It will come into effect the students of Hogwarts return after the holidays.

Signed,

Harry James Potter, Junior Inquisitor

Umbridge's eyes widened in anger, as she saw every single name signed to the bottom of the parchment. How did Potter even know? She would have thought he would have been distracted given the recent events and it would be her perfect opportunity to slip in to the Headmistress spot. It was almost like, just like with the werewolf legislation, Potter had deliberately done this to make her look inept.

The boy might have fooled the Minister of Magic but he was not fooling her. One day soon enough, Umbridge would make Potter pay for what he did. No one would politically out maneuver Dolores Umbridge and get away with it in the end.

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"I don't even know what this ring could be," said Ginny with a shrug as they sat in Harry's room at Number Twelve Grimmauld Place.

"The stone in the ring was completely untouched, but the band appears to be slightly weaker, as it was only discolored, but still intact," answered Harry, as he examined the ring as it was levitated in mid air. Even though the Horcrux had been expelled from it, Harry was a bit leery about touching the ring directly until he knew exactly what it was.

"Well if it's something that can even withstand Basilisk Venom, it has to have some powerful magical properties," answered Ginny with a slight shrug of her shoulders, as she looked at the ring. It looked rather tacky in her opinion, but there was something about it that gave off power. "I've never seen anything like that or even heard about anything for that matter."

"I showed it to Sirius and Remus, neither of them had any ideas either," inputted Harry, as he knew the ring was powerful, but whether it was a good kind of power or the negative power that prompted him to take apart Voldemort's wand to destroy it, he had no idea at all.

"Maybe the others might have an idea when we get back to Hogwarts," offered Ginny but before more could be said on the subject, the monitoring charms in the kitchen kicked on. Both straightened up, the charms would only kick on when certain people entered the kitchen, as they would only have a reason to be in the house if there was a meeting of the Order of the Phoenix in progress but since Dumbledore was on the run, Harry doubted there could be one here. Still he leaned in forward to listen.

"What are you doing here, Snape?" asked Sirius's voice in a bit of a confrontation manner.

"Down Black," responded Snape crudely from the kitchen. "Trust me when I'm not stopping by to have a cup of tea. I am here for important business regarding the Order of the Phoenix or to be more particular, your arrogant godson."

"What Snape?" asked Sirius.

"Dumbledore gave me explicit instructions to inform no one but Potter of this news," answered Snape.

"Looks like Dumbledore sent his lap dog to give you a message," muttered Ginny and Harry nodded as he leaned in closely to listen intently, to get a hint at what Snape and Dumbledore were up to.

"Considering I'm Harry's legal guardian it would perhaps be prudent to tell me, so I can determine whether or not to allow whatever Dumbledore has in mind," answered Sirius. "Of course, I don't even know if I should inform the Ministry you have been in contact with a fugitive of the law or not. They might be interested, as I've heard the only reason why you're still a free man is because of Dumbledore, there are a lot of people in that Ministry who want to see you shoved in Azkaban. There's no one to keep you out of Azkaban this time, Snivellius."

"Black, I'm not in the mood to play games, so why don't you be a good dog and fetch Potter for me so I can inform him what he is to do next term," said Snape scornfully.

"Oh yes, Snape, the dog jokes, those are so amusing," answered Sirius sarcastically. "Perhaps you should tell me to find a hydrant or chase a mailman next."

"I better go before this gets uglier than Snape," said Harry in a low voice which caused Ginny to snicker. Quickly, Harry gave Ginny a quick kiss good bye, before he discretely made his way downstairs, careful not to make it seem like he had overheard any part of that conversation. Harry reached the kitchen door as fast as he could walk before he opened it. And not a moment too soon as Sirius had just

gotten to his feet, to point his wand “Sirius I...oh hello, Professor Snape.”

“Good evening, Potter,” said Snape in a cool indifference voice. “Step inside and you will take a seat.”

“No, I’d prefer to stand, Snape,” answered Harry as Snape just gave an indifferent nod. It was obvious that it had just clicked in his mind that he was still on probation and one wrong word could cause Harry to throw a decree at him to end his career at Hogwarts. He needed to remain at Hogwarts on two accounts, one for the Dark Lord and one for the Dark Lord. “Of course, I should really be asking you what brings you to Headquarters today.”

“Professor Dumbledore has requested that I teach you Occlumency, an obscure branch of mental magic that can close one’s mind from external attacks,” said Snape as Potter looked back at him, not blinking not even reacting at all and this gave Snape a perfect opportunity to peek inside the mind of Potter. The boy was projecting his thoughts really dangerously, a textbook Gryffindor, easy prey for the Dark Lord as Snape could ready him as easily as a picture book for Muggle toddlers. It appeared the boy was curious about why Dumbledore had told Snape to teach Potter this and also there was a bit concern about whether or not the Ministry of Magic would capture his mentor. “Professor Dumbledore has speculated that due to the unique properties of the magical reaction between yourself and the Dark Lord, there was a magical connection between yourself and the Dark Lord forged. It is our hope, no matter how hopeless you seem, that with Occlumency, that connection that was created will be closed.”

“Well, if Dumbledore thinks this will be best, then I guess that’s what will be done,” answered Harry, as he put on a façade of being repulsed at the thought of sharing a connection with Voldemort but really he was amused. Snape had bought his simulated surface thoughts. As Harry had rightfully predicted, Snape had not resisted the temptation to look into Harry’s mind, which allowed Harry to slip around his shields. Harry found great humor in the fact that both Dumbledore and Voldemort were obsessed with finding out about a connection between Harry and Voldemort that no longer existed. Still,

Harry was willing to humor both of them and these Occlumency lessons would be the perfect opportunity to get information from Snape's mind about both Dumbledore and Voldemort. It was too good of a chance to pass off.

"There is just the matter of hiding the detection of these lessons from the rest of the school or to be more accurate, Dolores Umbridge," said Snape as he was about to give Potter an explanation of having Remedial Potions lessons, no doubt to take him down a peg.

"No problem, if anyone asks, I'm giving you Anger Management lessons, as one of the terms of revoking your probation," said Harry. "Anyone who's seen you on your worst day

"I do not need anger management lessons Potter!" snapped Snape angrily.

"Sure you don't," answered Harry. "I do have things to do, as I'm a very busy person these days, so the best I can spare is a couple of hours on Friday evening."

"Very well Potter," said Snape as he was in no mood to argue, but was very displeased that Potter was allowed to dictate the terms of something that he did not wish to do in the first place. Still his hands were very much tied on the matter. "We will begin on the first Friday after the term begins."

"Until then, Snape," answered Harry as he waved his hand as if to dismiss Snape as if he was a young child who was being sent out of the room so the adults could talk. Snape got to his feet and walked from the room. After all, he did not need all that much prodding to leave the kitchen and after he was certain Snape had completely vacated the house and disappeared away, Sirius turned to Harry with an amused look on his face.

"What you did to Snape, was more amusing than an entire seven years worth of pranks," answered Sirius with a look. "Still, if I was use, I would have told him where to stick those Occlumency lessons, but by now, I know you'd have your reasons."

“Astute Sirius, very, the truth is Snape cannot help looking into everyone’s mind to flaunt his skills, a fact that I have exploited once before and plan on doing so once again in the near future,” answered Harry. “I already know Occlumency, it comes as easily to me as breathing. The connection that Dumbledore told Snape about, in reality caused by the Horcrux in my head, was long gone, but I can fake it enough to make Snape think it’s still there and I’ll have problems closing my mind. He will bring it back to Dumbledore and it will add credibility to Dumbledore’s naïve belief that I’m still an easily manipulated pawn. Because, despite how bad it looks, I still think that sooner rather than later, Dumbledore will find his way to shake off this latest crisis. He still has his supporters both inside the Ministry and outside that will stick by him no matter how bad it looks.”

“No kidding, if Dumbledore committed mass murder in the middle of Diagon Alley, there will still be people who would insist that there was a reasonable explanation for him doing so,” said Sirius as he shook his head. “Still, I still couldn’t think of why Dumbledore would even think it would be a good idea to put yourself and Snape in the same room unsupervised. Maybe he’s lost his mind like the Daily Prophet’s saying he is.”

“It’s that flaw with Dumbledore, he thinks the best of everyone, he believes in redemption and that people can change,” responded Harry. “Still, I can handle Snape, don’t worry, and it will allow me to keep an eye out with both what Voldemort and Dumbledore are planning. Dumbledore hopes that Snape can find out about the connection he still believes to be there, but I hope to find out even more from Snape’s mind during those lessons. His defenses are good, but he has certain weaknesses that can be exploited once he is distracted by digging around false information in someone else’s head.”

“I can’t believe Snape could ever be useful, but I guess you’re right Harry,” answered Sirius with a bark like laugh. Normally he would be leery about Snape, but if Harry said he had the situation under control, than he believed him one hundred percent.

The first D.A. meeting of the year occurred the Wednesday after they returned to Hogwarts. It allowed everyone to have a couple of days to settle back to Hogwarts, but they needed to get right back into the swing of things straight away. Harry was impressed that the members of the group in general did not lose anything during the holidays. The teamwork exercises and the trust exercises were nearly to the point where Harry wanted them to be before he started to teach the more serious spell work to the members of the group. Right now, after the meeting, a set of six chairs had appeared in the room around a table, which allowed Harry, Ginny, Luna, Neville, Susan, and Daphne to sit down. Harry had briefly intended to keep this between himself, Ginny, Neville, and Luna, although he did reason that if it was a old magical object they might be familiar with. It was a long shot but Harry wanted to find out everything he could about this ring, even if it was the vaguest hint. The more he thought about it, the more he had a strong hunch that the ring might be of useful for the plans of reshaping the Wizarding World again.

"I think out of all the meetings, this was the best one yet," said Luna as they had settled into their seats. "We went a little long but other than that I can't think of anything else."

"The reaction time for dodging the spells is off in places and there were a couple of times that I saw that the teamwork could have more solid," summarized Ginny.

"I noticed that too but those glitches in teamwork and reaction time are getting few and far between," said Daphne. "Other than that, I think everything's running smoothly."

"I didn't see any real problems other than what you brought up," inputted Susan.

"We might be able to move onto teaching more advanced spells and techniques soon, right Harry?" asked Neville and Harry nodded.

"I agree with everything that you've said, everyone is willing to learn, not just for their own Defense Against the Dark Arts marks not to suffer, even if that was the case to begin with," answered Harry, as he removed the ring that was wrapped up in an old scarf from inside

of his bag. "Now that we have a bit of time, I came across an item over the holidays. One of the seven that I was looking for."

"Oh good, you got the ring," answered Luna happily as Susan and Daphne looked confused, as they did not know about the Horcruxes.

"Trust me, it's long and complicated, but it was one of the steps that Voldemort took that allowed him to survive the killing curse being propelled back at him that one night," said Harry as the two girls nodded. "I'll explain in detail when I have a bit more free time, but needless to say, I purged the ring completely of Voldemort's presence, but the ring itself remained intact. Even when I used basilisk venom, it could not be destroyed."

"That's impossible, basilisk venom is supposed to destroy anything it touches, unless it is protected by an anti-dissolving charm," said Daphne in awe and surprise, confused at exactly how something like that could have happened.

"Well, I know it's not protected by anti-dissolving charms, otherwise the Basilisk venom would have remained on the stone of the ring," answered Harry as he quickly unrolled the scarf. "Band's a bit discolored, but also in pretty good shape, the stone's completely undamaged, here is the ring, maybe any of you could have an idea what it is."

The group looked at the ring after Harry had unrolled the stone. Susan, Daphne, and Neville all looked at the ring in confusion, but Luna seemed to be very focused on the stone itself, as if she was searching for something. After a couple of moments, Luna's eyes widened on the sides of the stone, to a section that appeared to be just barely visible above the discolored band. She looked like she could hardly believe her eyes.

"Harry, the ring is absolutely useless, no magical properties whatsoever" answered Luna calmly as she looked at the group. "But the stone inside the ring, that's the strange thing. The marks on the side mean it could only be one thing. That ring is just a disguise to hide the real treasure, the Resurrection Stone."

"The what?" asked Ginny in confusion, and it looked like Neville was exactly as confused as she was and Harry appeared a bit confused, but also he was trying to recall something that was buried deep in the subconscious of his mind, perhaps some buried memory based on those who had absorbed from Voldemort. Susan and Daphne appeared they had a vague idea what Luna might be talking about, although the looks on their faces implied that they were not entirely sure.

"The Resurrection Stone, one of the three Deathly Hallows, the legend supplies that whoever possesses the three Deathly Hallows came become the master of death and basically become the magical equivalent of a god," said Luna and here Harry's eyes widened. Surely no magical artifacts could be that powerful and if these Hallows existed, he doubted very much that Voldemort knew what he had in his hand. Otherwise he would not have thrown it into a hovel so easily. Rather, he would have kept it closer by him.

"The Hallows, I thought they were a myth!" exclaimed Susan in surprise at this revelation.

"The Hallows, don't tell me you mean that fairy tale about three wizard brothers meeting death and getting magical artifacts?" asked Daphne skeptically, as she had heard that story many times when she was younger, but had found it to be far fetched, even by fictional standards.

"Well the fairy tale is just a loose interpretation of what may have happened," offered Luna carefully. "Death might have not been involved, but it might have been a really powerful witch or wizard who had been commissioned by the three brothers to make these artifacts. Still, the fact that Death was involved does make for a better story and a more plausible explanation of how the Deathly Hallows were made. Besides the fact it's a fairy tale, the fact that pointing out the artifacts could not have been created by mortal means would discourage anyone from trying to recreate them and make defective, perhaps unstable magical artifacts. Regardless of that, numerous fakes have popped up over the years, mostly from fast talking wizards trying to con people out of a few Galleons."

"Then how do we know this one isn't a fake as well?" asked Harry.
"Not that I don't believe you, but you could never be too careful."

"I don't blame you at all Harry, that's a good question, but there are two things that prove the stone you hold is not a fake," answered Luna. "The fact that when you put Basilisk Venom on it, it was not destroyed, in fact, it went through the stone into what was inside. If it was just a fake with an anti-dissolving charm, as you said, the venom would have remained on the top. The second, see those marks, just barely visible."

"Yes," said Harry, as the others leaned in for a closer look to at the marks. They were odd and peculiar to say the least.

"Well those marks have tried to be replicated over the years by a lot of people, but no one has come close, they've always come off as crooked or something like that," answered Luna. "So you have a genuine Deathly Hallow in your hand."

"So what exactly are these Deathly Hallows?" asked Harry, who had a feeling a better explanation would trigger some Voldemort obtained information deep within his subconscious. "What are the three objects?"

"Well, the Resurrection Stone you have, it has the power to bring back the dead, but not completely, rather in a ghostly form, unless there is a really strong connection between you and the dead person, they would be cold and indifferent towards you," explained Luna. "The Cloak...Harry, I just thought of something...about your Invisibility Cloak..."

"You have an Invisibility Cloak Harry?" asked Susan in surprise but really after a couple of seconds, she should not have been. No matter how rare they were, someone like Harry could afford to have one.

"Yes," answered Harry as Daphne looked amused.

"That explains quite a bit about you actually," responded Daphne in amusement. "Where did you get one anyway?"

"It was my father's, I got it during Christmas my first year, he used it at Hogwarts," answered Harry.

"That's impossible though, that means the cloak would have been at least twenty years ago and the charms should have already been fading with it, by now it should have been a normal cloak by now," said Daphne in disbelief. "So how could you use a cloak that old? It should have been rendered useless by now."

"Unless it's the Cloak of Invisibility," said Luna.

"The second Hallow, I take it?" asked Ginny and Luna nodded.

"Yes, unlike a regular Invisibility Cloak, the charms around it have never and may never worn off and it's more resistant to magical damage," summarized Luna. "It's really the most useful of three when it comes down to it, as you can move around easily without being seen. Even if you're still solid, the cloak can't be summoned off of you like other cloaks or damaged in any way. Really, if one was smart enough to avoid any human contact, they could hide under the Cloak for their entire life."

Here, Harry clenched his fist. If his father had been a bit more cunning and less Gryffindor, they could have used the Cloak and not bothered with the entire Fidelius Charm mess. Than again, he bet Dumbledore knew what the Cloak was and had borrowed it to eliminated the possibility. He wondered if his mother knew exactly what the Invisibility Cloak was as well and was half tempted to use the Resurrection Stone to ask her, but he resisted the temptation.

"So based on the legend, Harry may have the Cloak and the Stone," summarized Daphne.

"Yes, I think so, but I remember this now, but what's the third hallow?" asked Neville. "Isn't it something that is the most sought after, is the only one that's really been verified behind the legend."

"Yes, there's the Elder Wand, or as it is also known as, the Deathstick or the Wand of Destiny," replied Luna. "It's said to be a wand that's extremely powerful, that can't be destroyed no matter what and the

wielder is very difficult to beat, but not invincible as it can change hands when the current holder is beaten, even though more often than not, the wand is taken by rather underhanded means. They may have that power the other two Hallows, but still..."

"Nothings unbeatable," supplied Harry helpfully and Luna nodded.

"Any idea who has this Elder Wand, though?" questioned Neville.

"No, Dad did a study on it, it was wedged between a lot of more...creative articles in the Quibbler and thus no one really noticed it, but I remembered it, about two years ago," said Luna. "The trail's gone rather cold, at least in the past couple of centuries. It would take a bit of luck to even pick up the trail of who ended up with it and the person who has it might not even know what they have."

"It's out there, though," said Ginny.

"Yes, somewhere, it can't be destroyed, none of them can, but they can be hidden," answered Luna.

"Whoever holds the Hallows is the Master of Death," muttered Harry as he looked at Ginny significantly before he turned to address something he had just thought of. "Can more than one person possess the Hallows at the same time?"

"I don't know Harry, it's never been done before, but maybe because everyone who has had even one of the Hallows would keep it to themselves, not wanting to share the power," said Luna. "Still, I suppose it could be possible and no one would ever know until they try it."

"Well, I intend to find everything out that I can about the Deathly Hallows, before I made an informed decision what to do, they offer many intriguing possibilities for both success and also a few disturbing possibilities for failure," answered Harry, who felt that he needed to get the Elder Wand soon enough. Even if he found the Hallows, or at least the Elder Wand or the Resurrection Stone, the Cloak of Invisibility served him well, were more trouble than they were worth, he could keep them out of the hands of other people. At this

point, he had no idea what would be more difficult, getting the Cup out of Gringotts or finding out who currently had possession of the Elder Wand. "No matter what, if there's even the slightest hint about the Hallows in any of the books I have, I want to know about it."

"I agree with you Harry," answered Ginny with a smile.

"No kidding, most wizards would have saw the Hallows and got greedy without power, not even trying to understand it," answered Daphne. "The downfall of many people over the years, they get too much power and are over their heads."

"Most dark lords also think they along should have the power and history has proven how well that works out," said Harry who had learned so much, but from what he learned, it only gave him more questions.

"Don't worry Harry, we won't even hint about this to anyone," said Susan.

"No, kidding, if anyone even hears that Harry might have one, much less two of the Death Hallows, every psychotic power mad witch and wizard after Harry," said Ginny with a shudder.

"And one's more than enough," said Harry and sure enough, he found no disagreement. "Next meeting should be Sunday, I'll send word in the next day or two for sure, until then...I'll be around."

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Ron walked down the corridors, a bit lost in recent months. The events of the past year or so had weighed heavily on his mind. He had lost one of his best friends due to his own temper, his other best friend for reasons that still baffled him, and his father was lead to his death by someone that Ron considered to be a hero. He was confused, it was almost like his entire world had been turned upside down and now the school was revamped. He felt a pang of jealousy when he realized that Harry had gotten power and was actually doing something progressive with it, so he was even more beloved for making the school a much more positive place. Harry always had to

have everything. Sure he had been forced to live with those awful Dursleys for all those years and his parents were killed, but Ron had to wear second hand clothes and compete with the reputations of five older brothers, not to mention a sister who was better at Quidditch at him and had outclassed him in the educational field as well. She had gotten to be a prefect one year early, which was remarkable considering that if anyone could have become a prefect early, it should have been Hermione. At least that's what Ron assumed.

Ron stopped suddenly, as he saw a figure in the corridor slumped over in pain. He took a few cautious steps forward, when the face looked up towards Ron, with blood shot eyes and black rings underneath her eyes, with an extraordinarily pale and lifeless face. The hair looked a little lifeless as well.

"Hermione, is that you?" asked Ron as he stepped forward as Hermione shook her head, she seemed to be in another time zone. Ron tried to get Hermione to talk to him but she had been avoiding him and now with his father killed, Ron had been preoccupied with that. "Hermione!"

"What do you want?" asked Hermione in a strange voice, that was nothing like her own, it was cold, indifferent, and lacking of any life whatsoever. "Stay away from me, you're out to get me, stop it from happening, you all are..."

"Hermione, what's happened to you?" demanded Ron forcefully. It was almost like she had stopped taking care of herself a long time ago, but she had not looked this bad. She stood, her robes wrinkled, unlike what Hermione would have worn before.

"Nothing that concerns you," said Hermione in a blank tone, as her eyes darted towards the ceiling. She had not had a chance to put the glamour spells back on her to hide the ravages of dark magic, but it was all for a good cause. Harry had to be saved. "You're just like the rest of them, the entire world, they're out to get me, to keep me away from my Harry..."

"Hermione, you're confused, you need to get to the Hospital Wing," said Ron but this was the wrong thing to say as he was magically

shoved against a wall and his arms and legs snapped together in a full body bind.

“Confused, I’m not confused, I’m seeing the only thing that is a possible explanation, that diary thing, Ginny wasn’t a victim of Voldemort, no on the contrary, she willingly conspired with him to lead Harry to his doom, to take him away from me,” said Hermione in a crazed voice, as her eyes darted back and forth. “That didn’t work, now she’s seduced Harry away from me. He’s lost, confused, don’t worry Harry, I’ll make it all better for you, I’ll kill that bitch before she leads you to danger. Everyone’s been blinded Ronald, but see I’m not. Ginny’s got an agenda and Harry’s going to be taken down with it.”

Ron’s eyes widened, as he gave Hermione a look that plainly stated she was mad.

“Harry needs me, he needs me, he needs me, he needs me,” stated Hermione, as her words slowly trailed off into whispers before she just mouthed the words “he needs me” over and over again as her eyes were wide the entire time she said this without blinking. “He needs me, Ron and I know what you’re thinking in that simple little mind of yours. Hermione’s gone off the deep end, she needs help, no I don’t need help, Ginny’s the only one that needs help and she will get that help, six feet under. I will kill your sister Ron and then all will be as it should be. We’re be one big happy Golden Trio again. Harry and I will be married and you can be our lackey. Won’t that be grand?”

The look on Ron’s face obviously thought it would not be but Hermione placed a silencing charm on Ron before she raised her wand. A light shaped like a black triangle shot out of it and impacted Ron in the chest. His mount indicated a blood curdling shriek that no one would hear.

“A nice little binding charm to keep you quiet Ron,” said Hermione blandly. “If you try and tell anyone anything that I said or try to hint through your alleged concerns to anyone else, your heart will implode.”

Ron's eyes widened as Hermione looked ecstatic at the possibility of this happening to him. It confirmed his deepest darkest fear that losing out on the opportunity to become prefect because of her own actions and Harry dating Ginny instead of her had caused Hermione's mind to snap, to become disconnected with reality. That charm she used on him had to be dark magic and she did it with no remorse. The full body bind dropped but by the time Ron could recover, Hermione was gone. Now he had the matter that Hermione had planned to murder Ginny and he could do nothing about it. Even though he was not the brightest of individuals, Ron knew that anyone attempting to harm Ginny would not put them in Harry's good books. Hermione refused to believe that Harry was happy with Ginny and had grown obsessed with righting what she perceived to be a wrong. It did not take a genius to figure that out based on what Ron just saw.

Hermione was in the distance, Ron was out to prevent her destiny by Harry's side from happening, just like everyone else, from Dumbledore on down. But Hermione would not be blinded, Ginny might have fooled everyone else to thinking she was a victim in the Chamber of Secrets. She had willingly conspired with the diary to lure Harry down there and would have gotten away with it, had Harry not managed to luck his way into another victory over Voldemort.

The dark magic that she learned had some affects, a few black outs here and there and her grades had slipped down to an "Acceptable" level, but Hermione reasoned that she had her life under control. She was the brightest witch of her age. She could find a way to handle any side effects that the dark arts gave her. Hermione felt she did not have a problem or needed any help. The fact that Harry had banned the word "Mudblood" was a desperate cry for help, a desperate cry that Harry needed Hermione.

Hermione would rescue her beloved from the web that he had been ensnared in and she would make sure Ginny Weasley drew her last breath. Once she had the opportunity she would strike. She would be the savior of the savior of the Wizarding World.

Hermione Granger and Harry Potter were meant to be together and those Weasleys meddled in destiny by trying to drive them apart.

In the corridor, unknown to Hermione, a figure stood, with a grin on her toad like face. She would need to monitor this situation closely, but Miss Granger could very much be of use to her plans, a tool to be used against Harry Potter and his friends if she played her cards correctly.

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"So how did your lessons with Snape go?" asked Ginny, as they had sunk down on the bed in their room in the former Chamber of Secrets.

"Well, Snape thinks that I have the worst organized mind in history and he'll take that news back to Dumbledore immediately, I gathered that he was going to meet with Dumbledore tomorrow, under the pretext of purchasing Potion supplies, but exactly where Dumbledore is, Snape's has kept that information more protected than most of the thoughts flowing around his head," answered Harry, as Ginny began to absent mindedly massage the back of his neck. "I did learn that they're still searching for the person that ratted out the Aurors, still haven't picked up on that false trail I laid down yet."

"Maybe you should have made it easier to find," said Ginny, as she leaned in close. Harry could feel her breath on the back of his neck and it made it very difficult to concentrate. Still, he welcomed the slow kisses that she began to plant on the back of his neck.

"Perhaps, Voldemort's up to his usual tricks, with Dumbledore out of the picture for the time being he's a bit bolder than he's been since he returned, more than a few new recruits, I've gotten some names from Snape's mind, but I doubt that's everyone," said Harry. "Voldemort never would let any Death Eater learn the name of any other Death Eater, it's too much of a security liability."

"True," said Ginny, as she shifted her position, so she could place her fingers on Harry's hair and run them through it.

"Voldemort's also planning to break his followers out of Azkaban soon, that's the only other piece of information I found," said Harry.

"We knew this was coming," said Ginny and Harry had to agree, they knew it was coming.

"At least Bellatrix Lestrange will be broken out of Azkaban, Voldemort's saving me the trouble there, if only I can capture her somehow and lead her to that vault to get the Hufflepuff Cup," replied Harry.

"It won't be easy, she is one of his most dangerous followers," said Ginny.

"Not to mention the most fanatically loyal," answered Harry with a shake of his head.

"Still I'm sure you're figure out something Harry, you always do," encouraged Ginny.

"I know, but we need to figure out away to ease this tension that I've been having with all that's been going on as of late with everyone," said Harry with a mischievously smile.

"I think I can help with that," said Ginny with an equally mischievous smile of his own and Harry wrapped his arms around Ginny, before he pulled her around into a deep passionate kiss. Ginny returned as their tongues met each other, with their hands being run over each other's bodies, as clothes slowly became wrinkled and found their way on the floor. The night was rather young all things considered and they felt further drawn to each other, as their activities got more intense and more passionate.

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Lord Voldemort sat with a triumphant smile. All was ready, soon he would have his most faithful followers, the one's that kept up his noble work after he was said to be dead, sprung from Azkaban prison and he would be one step closer to his goal of ultimate domination.

There's...holy shit, Chapter Twenty Two already. Where has the time gone? And the interesting thing is, I'm not anywhere close being done telling the story I want to tell. As for how many more chapters that will

be, there will be as many as I need to tell what I need to tell. Next Chapter, a trip into the mind of Bellatrix Lestrange, along other things. And just a fair warning, I'm going to take some creative liberties on Bellatrix's age along with the ages of the rest of the Black sisters. I'm under the philosophy, if it's not printed in the books, it's not canon (unless I have a use for a character that has been named outside the books like Astoria or the facts presented elsewhere make sense to the vision of the story I'm telling).

With that in mind, see you again after a little while.

Chapter Twenty Three: Breakout

Cornelius Fudge was currently in the process of completing the process of signing off on some legislation. It was nothing earth shattering, just the regular paperwork that he had to deal with each and every day in the Ministry of Magic. Dumbledore was still out there, but he had his Aurors work overtime to bring the disgraced Hogwarts Headmaster into custody. There were a few sightings, but turned out to be dead ends. Fudge sighed. He admired Rufus's dedication to take steps based on official Ministry policy, but this time it may have allowed Dumbledore to slip around. Fudge would be willing to look the other way on this case, if the Aurors had just stunned Dumbledore, without first giving him the opportunity to surrender his wand. Now Fudge was still the laughing stock of the Daily Prophet and it had been hinted that he should step down as Minister. Both on the account of him allowing a death to happen within his own Ministry, a pureblood wizard at that, and not capturing the person that was alleged to be behind the death. Fudge was really grateful for Harry's recent donation, they would help fund a banquet that he would invite the most respected and most influential pureblood families in the Ministry. It would show them he was a great man and salvage his reputation among the most important services.

At first, the loud frantic sounds of footsteps moving around outside was something that the Minister thought very little of at first. After all, this was the Ministry of Magic, there were people running around daily in a hurry, hiding an entire world from view of the Muggles did have its share of stressful moments. Still, the frantic noise in the hallway was such that Fudge could not hear himself think and was about to get up to personally investigate the matter himself but seconds later, it turned out that he did not need to take that step.

"Minister!" shouted a frantic voice from the hallway and Fudge's eyes bolted up as the door opened up to see his Junior Assistant, Percy Weasley enter the office, looking rather flushed, not to mention slightly stressed out.

"What is it, Weasley?" asked Fudge in a sharp tone of voice before he added in a slightly more hopeful tone of voice. "Has Dumbledore been found?"

"No, I'm sorry Minister, but the Aurors all just set off to Azkaban right now, there has been a breach on the island," said Percy frantically. "Mr. Scrimgeour told me to pass off the message, something's gone wrong, the Dementors have been neutralized somehow and the Auror guards on the island have sent a distress signal and his Aurors are going to investigate what went wrong."

Fudge looked grave at that news. Azkaban had been a touchy area over the past couple of years, ever since Black had broken out. Even though the man was later proven to be innocent, that did not matter, as the fact was that it only proved that someone could break out of Azkaban with a little luck.

"Stand by and give further news once you receive it Weasley, I must speak with my Director of Magical Press in case worst comes to worst," answered Fudge briskly and Percy nodded, before he walked off. The Minister knew that beyond the fact he had to figure out how to spin this incident so he would not look bad, he also had to explain any fugitives from Azkaban to the Muggle Prime Minister. He had hoped that he would not have to take his step, but given the fact that everyone in the Ministry seemed to be in such an uproar right now, it was likely that he would have to prepare. Fudge turned down a corridor, but he heard his Junior Assistant call down the hallway after him. The Minister turned as the young man looked very distressed and almost dreaded passing on the news he was about to give.

"Mr. Scrimgeour has told me that there has been a mass escape of the prison," said Percy and Fudge hitched a breath in, as several dreadful possibilities of what happened appeared in his head. "I need to go, he and his Aurors are doing a complete head check of all of the prisoners, it may take a little bit of time to do so, because the Dementors are all riled up after that attack, it's taking time to keep them at bay and to get everything sorted completely out."

Fudge nodded, as he crossed his fingers that only a couple of prisoners at the very most had escaped, even though he would be a fool to admit that he had that much luck. Percy turned to keep an ear out for any more news and it appeared that he was not the only one who was doing so.

Everyone in the corridors of the Ministry waited for what appeared to be an eternity, but in reality was only ten or fifteen minutes. Then from a room off to the side, a very weakened looking Rufus Scrimgeour, along with a decent sized amount of Aurors. There appeared to be some minor injuries, but more than anything they were just shaken up. Fudge stepped forward to get the news, which judging by the look on Rufus's face was anything but good news.

"The Aurors stationed at Azkaban are still alive, but seriously wounded from whoever stormed the prison, they're being taken to St. Mungos for treatment, but it's likely given their injuries they were attacked from behind and did not see the intruder or intruders," reported Scrimgeour and Fudge's expression paled at this news but the worse was yet to come.

"Exactly how many escaped before you could get the confusion that the intruders caused under control?" asked Fudge, even though he doubted he even wanted to know.

"It appears that at least thirty that we can account for have escaped the prison," said Scrimgeour and here Fudge looked as if someone had punched him in the stomach but Scrimgeour was not done yet. "Thirteen of them had been suspected to be followers of He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named, the other seventeen, in on various charges from theft against Muggles using magic all the way to murder. None of those other eighteen that have been ever connected to He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named to my knowledge."

"Dumbledore," said Fudge coldly as he knew what was going on. Dumbledore had finally lost his mind and gone mad with power. He obviously had not taken Fudge's ability to believe his word about You-Know-Who still being alive over the official evidence gathered by the Ministry. As a measure to spite him and ruin Fudge's career, Dumbledore had all of those former Death Eaters released, to make the public think of the possibility that he might have been right about the rumors. "Any leads that you can gather to get these fugitives safely back into Azkaban, do so immediately Rufus"

“At once, Minister,” agreed Scrimgeour with a nod of his head as he turned his head to the Aurors. “Let’s go men, hopefully by then the Dementors calmed down and we can get around Azkaban a bit easier.”

The Aurors nodded before they followed Scrimgeour. Fudge stayed behind, as he walked off. He had a rough next few days ahead of him. He needed to spin this in a way that it would be as least damaging to his career as possible. Deep down, he really did not believe Dumbledore would have anything to do with this, but right now, such a minor thing such as logic could not get in the way of Fudge.

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Albus Dumbledore sat in a darkened basement. A Muggle family that he was moderate acquaintances with had given him full permission to use their basement as a meeting place. Dumbledore had been vague on exactly what the meetings were, but it kept him away from the safe retreat that he had set up to hide from the Ministry. Order meetings were still held but not as often as for one thing, there was little news to pass along since Dumbledore had gone under ground and secondly, many of the Order members had quit. Dumbledore had heard the news of the Aurors being released from Azkaban, under “evidence” that they had been brainwashed by Dumbledore to join. Judging by the Daily Prophet article, it was pretty solid evidence, otherwise Fudge would have never gone for it. This rather worried Dumbledore, as he wondered who could have given evidence of that matter that was believable. Someone cunning and perhaps in Voldemort’s Inner Circle, which meant the Aurors might have been coerced in signing an agreement to support Voldemort for their freedom. This possibility gravely concerned Dumbledore beyond any others he could even come up with. It also had proven that Dumbledore was right to not be clear and concise completely with all of the members of the Order of the Phoenix everything. It may be cost him the Weasleys, but the cost would have been greater had they been told everything.

A knock on the door brought Dumbledore out of his thoughts and he held his wand.

"The password," answered Dumbledore just in case it was a team of Aurors that had found him and he would need to fight once again. He had a couple of very close calls, too close for his own liking.

"The Bumblebee lies low," said Severus's voice, as if almost he thought the words were a bit silly to use as a password.

"Enter, Severus," said Dumbledore, as at this time, Severus had been teaching Harry Occlumency for three weeks. The connection had been as difficult to close as they had theorized, Snape had noticed thought patterns that could only resemble those of the Dark Lord and now with a few more weeks or a couple of months at most, of experimentation to see exactly what the full extent of the link was, Severus could find a way to conclude the lessons. "Sit down and tell me your progress with young Harry."

"I have something more pressing than my lessons with the golden brat, I don't even know why you even bother Albus, his mind is growing even more susceptible to intrusion as the Dark Lord grows stronger and he will become even more of a liability than he already is before too much longer," said Severus. "Even without the prophecy in mind, what makes you so sure that Potter is our only hope? If you ask me, based on how easily the Dark Lord could take control of the boy's mind if he really wanted to and may plan to do so yet."

"Severus, once again, all will be explained when the time was right," said Dumbledore, using an answer that had come to him as easily as breathing. Truthfully, he had fully expected Voldemort to attempt to possess Harry soon enough once he had fully learned of the connection, but as always, Dumbledore had a pretty general idea what would have happen. Dumbledore believed the power that the Dark Lord knew not was love and thus Voldemort could not stand to be in Harry's body for more than a few seconds. That was also Dumbledore's theory of why Harry's blood appeared to have been poisoning Voldemort. It would leave Voldemort in a weakened state when it came time for Harry's victory that would be enough to push him into his role as Dumbledore's intended successor as the Leader of the Light.

"If you believe so, Headmaster," answered Severus in a resigned voice, there were a few times that Dumbledore was a bit generous with the information that he gave. Other times vague and many times, he had kept his cards tight to his chest, until they were ripped from it and his hands were forced. He would have thought this recent event with Arthur Weasley would have taught Dumbledore something about too much secrecy.

"Now, Severus, you told me you had some important news for me," said Dumbledore.

"The Dark Lord has succeeded in breaking his followers out of Azkaban, along with a number of other prisoners, most likely who agreed to join the Dark Lord for a bit of freedom," answered Snape and Dumbledore just took a deep breath as he looked at Snape.

"It's only just started, Voldemort would want more manpower to get into the Department of Mysteries, to steal the prophecy, and Fudge is likely to pin this on myself because of our recent falling out," said Dumbledore as his shoulders slumped, it was just getting closer to Voldemort finding a way to lure Harry into the Department of Mysteries.

"Manpower is not the objective, since Rookwood has been broken out, the Dark Lord can and will know everything about the Department of Mysteries that he wants to," said Snape and Dumbledore nodded.

"Indeed, a cause of a concern, as is the number of escapees from Azkaban but I doubt that Voldemort would unleash them on the public at large yet," said Dumbledore. "Scattered attacks on occasion perhaps but nothing ground breaking, Tom's not going to reveal his hand as of yet."

"He's calling again," muttered Snape as he felt the dark mark on his skin burn. It was getting more and more difficult to get away at Hogwarts, while Minerva managed to keep Umbridge at bay, that woman was nosing around a bit too much and while he knew that Potter might have the ability to keep Umbridge off of his back,

Snape's pride refused to let him ask that boy for a favor. "I best leave now."

"Yes, Severus, it is unwise to keep him waiting, he has had an unfortunate temper as of late, I would hate for you to be on the receiving end of it once more," said Dumbledore as Snape got to his feet. "I trust I will see you next week at this same time."

"If I can manage it," replied Snape in an indifferent tone of voice as Dumbledore watched Snape leave. Soon the time would come for Voldemort to show himself to the world. He would not keep himself in the shadows for much longer and then it would prove to the Ministry that Dumbledore had told the truth about Voldemort's return all around. If it took a few more months on the run, then it was all for the greater good.

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Amelia Bones sighed as she returned from an emergency meeting of the Wizengamot. The thirty fugitives that escaped from Azkaban was perhaps the biggest disgrace the Ministry of Magic had to endure. She did not envy Rufus Scrimgeour, who would be constantly criticized in the press every day went by when he was unable to capture even a single one of the Azkaban thirty.

Still, for once, a Wizengamot session had gone by and something more productive had gotten completed beyond meaningless squabbling. Two more pieces of legislation, both proposed by the youngest member of the Wizengamot, Harry Potter, had been voted though. Even though one of those pieces would still need to be approved by the Hogwarts Board of Governors, one of them would help with the understaffed Auror Department. It would offer additional training for prospective Aurors that did not quite meet the requirements when they took their N.E.. It would offer an opportunity to brush up on their skills by being taught by some of the best in their field before they received another chance for their N.E..

The second piece of legislation was a mandate for Severus Snape to lower his requirements to attend his N.E.W.T. Potion class from an

“Outstanding” to an “Exceeds Expectations” minimum grade. Harry reasoned that was the one class that crushed the dreams of many Aurors and thus with an approval of the Board of Governors, they would make the mandate official. If Snape refused to comply, then the Board would find a Potions Master that would replace him. The man was walking a thin line and based on what she heard from Susan, Amelia was not too sure that Snape was too good of a teacher to being with.

It brought her back to Harry Potter, as everything seemed to do as of late. Just recently, Harry had finally taken his seat on the Wizengamot and seemed to fit in great. He knew how to play the very political game that the members of the court enjoyed. They were not interested in doing what was best for the Ministry and the people they governed, but rather what was best for their name and their status. Harry obviously knew this and managed to twist several of his ideas in a way that made the more ambitious members of the Wizengamot think that it would benefit them above all else. In reality, Harry appeared to be slowly increasing his own influence while diluting the influence of other, more poisonous members of the court.

Given what Susan hinted in her letters, Harry had a chance to change the Wizarding World. She said she could not go into details and Amelia understood. There was too much of a chance someone might get an idea of the changes that Harry was trying to get through and might try to maneuver to silence him. Politically or otherwise, many up and coming young men had suffered same fates, by an old guard who was unwilling to let go of the power they held for many decades.

Still, Harry was on the verge of making some great waves through the Wizarding World. That both intrigued and worried Amelia at the same time. The need for change was overdue but at the same time, many much older and wiser than Harry had been corrupted by a bit of success. For Harry's sake and the sake of his friends, Amelia hoped that Harry would not be led astray by someone. Already, he had been pulled back and forth between Dumbledore and Fudge, but those would not be the only politicians who would want to take advantage of Harry's new found influence within the Ministry.

It would be a trying next couple of years for the Wizarding World, with these rumors about Voldemort, than even though some had discounted them as the ramblings of a senile old man, Amelia believed they had more and more credence each day.

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"Rise before Lord Voldemort, Rookwood," said Voldemort and the former Unspeakable, a battle tested middle aged man looked at his master.

"Master, I thank of your generosity, the potion that you have given me has restored most of my sanity and I am ready to help crush all that oppose you once more," said Rookwood in a raspy voice.

"You deserve it Rookwood, you have braved the walls of Azkaban, rather than renounce my power as some have, but now since you are out, I have need of your knowledge regarding the Department of Mysteries or to be more particular, the Hall of Prophecy," said Voldemort softly. "There is a prophecy that I feel will give me valuable knowledge on how to defeat my greatest enemy and I have sent two deep into the Hall of Prophecy. One was caught and jailed but once the second had his hands on the prophecy, he went mad. I wish to know why."

"Well, the prophecies are created as such where only those who they pertain to can lift them from the shelves," answered Rookwood.

"Yet, Avery had told me that anyone could retrieve the prophecy for me," said Voldemort but Rookwood shook his head.

"No, My Lord, it is mistaken, only those who the prophecy is about can even touch the orb once its on the shelf, once its off the shelf, it can be touched by anyone," explained Rookwood and Voldemort nodded, the former Unspeakable had given him the information that he needed.

"Very well, leave me Rookwood, I thank you for the knowledge that you have given me and send in Wormtail, I wish to speak with him on

a matter before I deal with Avery,” ordered Voldemort and Rookwood responded with a nod.

“At once, my Lord,” responded Rookwood as he left and Voldemort stood, to await Wormtail. Seconds later, Wormtail walked forward and Voldemort regarded him with an icy stare.

“Crucio,” hissed Voldemort angrily before Wormtail could even breath. Wormtail fell to the ground, as Voldemort placed him under the Cruciatus Curse for about twenty seconds. When he released the curse, Wormtail was on the floor in agony. “To your feet, Wormtail, you inept fool.”

Wormtail did as he was told and Voldemort stood forward, before he motioned for Wormtail to walk forward.

“You’re bumbling with the ritual has caused me to return at a fractured state, I’m required to take further steps to rectify it, thus distracting myself from my plans” said Voldemort as he looked in Wormtail’s eyes, which were wide with absolute fear in them. Voldemort forced his way into Wormtail’s simple mind and found what had happened. Potter’s flippant remark about telling Wormtail to take his blood had botched the ritual. Magic had its strange way of leading a life of its own and one simple word could change an entire ritual. Voldemort thought Wormtail was a fool not to gag Potter.

“My Lord, I apologize, it was...” stated Wormtail feebly.

“Enough Wormtail, you are lucky that you are needed still, otherwise, I would execute you right now, but be warned, one more mistake and you will perish, most painfully, your bumbling caused Potter to defeat me at a weakened state and steal my wand, not to mention alert Albus Dumbledore to my return, even though that is just minor compared to the other infractions,” said Voldemort coldly. “Do not fail me again Wormtail or it will be your head. Understand me.”

“Y-y-yes, My Lord, I live to serve you,” stammered Wormtail fearfully.

“Good, now go make yourself useful for once and get me Avery,” ordered Voldemort and Wormtail scurried off to do so, before Avery

walked in moments later. Avery walked over to bow towards Voldemort but the Dark Lord motioned for him to stop. "Avery, to your feet, you lied to me."

"My Lord?" asked Avery fearfully.

"You told me anyone could lift the orb from the shelf, but Rookwood has told me differently," answered Voldemort in an icy cold tone of voice and Avery braced himself for what happened next. "I have no use for people who lie to me within my ranks."

"Please, my Lord, I thought it would not matter...give me one more chance to prove myself...I'll do anything...please don't..." stammered Avery.

"You've run out of chances," responded Voldemort coldly as he lifted his wand and a jet of green light blasted from his wand to strike Avery right in the chest. The Death Eater dropped to the ground, never to breath another lie to the Dark Lord. Voldemort turned to the snake under his chair. "Nagini, dinner."

Voldemort watched his snake move forward, stalking her prey. He would need to lure Potter into the Department of Mysteries soon enough to both get the prophecy and then use his body to transfer his mind into Potter's body. Once he figured out how to exploit this connection properly and manipulate it, he would achieve his goals. Lord Voldemort would not be denied.

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Bellatrix Lestrange sat in a dark chamber underneath the drawing room in Malfoy Manor that her brother in law Lucius, had so generously provided. It was musty, smelled of urine, decay, Bellatrix could have sworn she saw a decomposing corpse of a house elf down here, although she was not in too much of a hurry to check. It was putrid, it was disgusting, it was just like home and much better than Azkaban ever was.

Bella sat in the darkness, pleased that the Dark Lord had broken her out, even though she would have to remain underground for a while.

The Dark Lord was the only thing that had ever gone well in her life, the rest of her life had been filled with heartache and pure misery.

It all started the day she was born, the youngest of three sisters, her mother had died because of complications from childbirth. It happened quite regularly in the Wizarding World, when a mother gave birth to a magical child that was many times more powerful than she was. Bella's father was not too happy and he blamed Bella for the death of his wife. It would have been more humane to kill her, but her father had kept her alive long enough to belittle her and smack her around when he was in a foul mood. Bellatrix cherished these fond childhood memories, they were something to behold.

Still, it was quite fortunate that her father was only around scarcely and other than the times he was around, Bella remembered she had lived a fairly normal childhood. She enjoyed reading Muggle comic books when she was younger, something that enraged her father when he found her doing so one day. Needless to say, Bella could not walk for two weeks after her father was done with her and she made sure to never let her catch reading them again.

When she was nine years old, Bellatrix and her father developed a rather close relationship. In fact, you could say they were almost business partners. Her father had used her as an incentive to close any deals he made with his pureblood associates. Bellatrix had spent a lot of quality time with much older men thanks to her dear old dad.

Soon enough, it was to Hogwarts, where she entered her first year, along with her cousin Sirius. Bella felt that she and Sirius were the only one's who had an idea how messed up their family was and had in some strange way bonded over it. Well Andromeda might have known as well, as she had left when Bellatrix was eight to run off with that Mudblood Tonks and thus their trigger happy aunt had blasted her off the family tree. Still, they spent a great deal of their childhood torturing Kreacher, although the elf seemed to take Bella's repeated attempts to disembowel him as a sign of love and affection. There was something wrong with that house elf.

Still, Bellatrix had contributed in some of the pranks that Sirius and his friends had pulled during their time at Hogwarts, as an unofficial

“Fifth Marauder”, even though this went behind mostly behind the back of one James Potter. Lupin might have guessed, but Bella really did not know. Potter was the most closed minded bigot that Bella had ever had the misfortune of encountering. If anyone was sorted into Slytherin, they just had to be evil. Potter was responsible for turning more people in Slytherin towards the Dark Lord than anyone else. Sirius had just barely tolerated her after a few years, thanks to Potter’s corruptive influence and his attitude had not improved about Slytherins over time. How Evans ever married Potter was a mystery to Bella. Bellatrix suspected the Mudblood suffered some severe head trauma between her sixth and seventh year.

In fact, Evans reminded Bellatrix of another painful memory. Her first crush was on Severus Snape, but Snape appeared to have only eyes for the Mudblood. It was obvious that Evans was only using Severus to gain knowledge of the dark arts and truly did not consider him as a true friend or even a human being. It was disturbing how the world had painted James and Lily Potter as saints after their death, when they were anything but. It made Bella want to vomit.

In their third year Bellatrix confronted Evans about her using Severus as a tool for increasing her own knowledge and one thing lead to a duel between the two. As much as she hated to admit it, Bellatrix lost the duel, partly because the Mudblood fought dirty but mostly because Bella was nowhere near as skilled as magic as she would become one day. She was mostly interested in Quidditch and had in fact become the seeker during her second year, the first female player on the Slytherin house team in two hundred years and the only one since then. Her father was not too pleased, as female Quidditch players were not thought too highly of in the circles he lurked in. When he found out the news, her father asked Bellatrix if she was a “fucking dyke”. Her charming dad, he had such a poetic way with words.

The anger that her father had over the Quidditch thing was not compared to the anger he felt when Bella lost a duel to a Mudblood. He grabbed her by the throat the minute she stepped out of the Floo and dragged her upstairs, before he put the Cruciatus Curse on her for three minutes. When Bella began to cry in pain in pain, her father snidely remarked that he would really give her something to cry about

and true to his word, he did. He remarked that Bella's problem was she showed weakness and it made her an easy target. It would take her a couple of years for her father's words completely sank in and it would influence her life in a big way.

The next horrific incident, the straw that broke the Hippogriff's back, was during Christmas in her fifth year at Hogwarts. She had realized that she liked Sirius beyond just being cousins and tried to get a sense if he felt the same way. When Bella tried to kiss Sirius, he was repulsed, pushing her away before he ran off. Perhaps it was because they were cousins, but to be fair, that was far from uncommon in pureblood society. Bella however knew the truth, she repulsed Sirius, because she was too weak, too fragile, let others step over her easily. It was the last time she saw Sirius, until she was sent to Azkaban; she left Hogwarts the next day and went into hiding for the next year, to learn enough dark arts to eliminate the one person that needed to die before she could move on with her life. This person needed to die first or Bella would remain weak. She needed to know enough to murder her father.

On her seventeenth birthday, Bellatrix treated her to the greatest gift she could imagine, the death of her father. She surprised him, he had just buried himself deep into a bottle and she quickly tied him to a chair, before she punished him with a vicious Cruciatus Curse. As she stripped away his sanity with the painful torture that the curse had offered, she thanked him for everything he ever did for her and to her during her life. Her father pleaded for his life the entire time, but Bella refused, saying that would make her weak. She also in the ultimate act of humiliation, refused to grant her father a humane magical death. Rather, she caved his skull in with a crowbar. It was a glorious memory that she pleased herself to during this cold, lonely, nights in Azkaban.

With her father dead, Bellatrix knew there was one person that she could join, that would allow her to never be weak. That was Lord Voldemort. She had contacted Rodolphus Lestrage, who she knew had been in contact with the Dark Lord recently. A meeting was set up. The Dark Lord had rarely accepted female members into the ranks of his Death Eaters, but was impressed when Bellatrix managed to defeat a half of a dozen Death Eaters on her own. The

Dark Lord personally saw something in Bellatrix that no one else did and trained her personally in the dark arts. He was a tough, but fair, teacher. In that time, Bellatrix had married Rodolphus Lestrage on the encouragement of the Dark Lord, who wished to have two strong purebloods like themselves produce heirs that could be used in his empire. Six months later the Dark Lord fell and then about another year after, Bella, Rodolphus, his brother Rabastan, and Barty Crouch Jr. were all sent to Azkaban where Bella was tortured by the memories of her father that taunted her for being weak.

Now, the Dark Lord had offered her a second chance by breaking her out and Bella vowed to make the most of it. She also planned to kill Sirius if such an opportunity arose. Not only had he shunned her but he had refused to help her escape Azkaban when he did. The selfish bastard had escaped and left Bella to relive all of her lovely childhood memories, including the drunken fun that Bella's father had with her. Sirius would pay for what he did to Bellatrix, with his life.

Bellatrix Lestrage would prove to the world why she was personally trained in the dark arts by Lord Voldemort.

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Hermione Granger sat down in the office of Umbridge, who had told her to stay behind after class. She hoped that this was not going to take long. She had already developed a headache from lack of usage of dark arts. It was lucky that no one had seen her almost pass out when she had walked from Charms the other day.

"Miss Granger," said Umbridge sweetly.

"What do you want?" snapped Hermione angrily, the sight of this woman repulsed her, she just barely suppressed the urge to use some of the curses she learned on her.

"Now that's no way to treat the person that can get you sent to Azkaban for practicing the dark arts with a few words," answered Umbridge and Hermione's expression paled. "Yes, Miss Granger, I know your secret and I can get you removed from Hogwarts and into Azkaban with a few choice words."

"Why don't you then?" asked Hermione as her eyes darted from side to side, as if she almost expected Aurors to jump out of the fireplace and nab her.

"I could, but I won't," answered Umbridge sweetly. "However, I want you to do something for me or I could very well change my mind."

"What?" asked Hermione quickly, as she was willing to do anything before she got put away before she saved Harry from Ginny.

"I want you to find out what Harry Potter is up to, he's doing something to overthrow the Ministry and I want solid evidence that I can take to the Ministry of Magic and have his Junior Inquisitor position revoked, before given to a more suitable candidate," answered Umbridge.

"No," responded Hermione, who refused to do anything to betray Harry, especially to this toad of a woman.

"Well what if I tell you that I can help you get Harry and eliminate Ginny Weasley as your competition for his heart," replied Umbridge with a grin, as Hermione looked hopeful at this possibility. "Just find me proof and I can give you Harry Potter, with Weasley out of the picture once and for all."

"I'll see what I can do," responded Hermione who did not believe for one second that Umbridge would keep her end of the bargain. Still, if Hermione had a chance, she could perhaps murder Umbridge and make it look like an accident. She was one of the people who wanted to keep Hermione and Harry apart and Hermione was not fooled for a second that she wanted to help.

"I know you would, I'll be in touch, Miss Granger," responded Umbridge in her sugary sweet voice, that gave Hermione a strong urge to take a tire iron to her skull.

The next morning, the following decree hung all over several locations in Hogwarts for all to see.

Hogwarts Education Decree Number Thirty:

Anyone who is caught calling the wizard known as Lord Voldemort, You-Know-Who, He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named, or the Dark Lord will be subjected to disciplinary actions. It is by the decree of the Hogwarts Junior Inquisitor that he is called either Voldemort or his birth name, Tom Marvolo Riddle. This measure has been suggested by the Hogwarts Junior Inquisitor and approved by the needed majority of Hogwarts prefects.

Signed,

Harry James Potter, Junior Inquisitor.

And at the bottom were the names of all of the Hogwarts prefects who approved on the new decree.

And there's Chapter Twenty Three. No points to anyone who guesses why this chapter is unique.

Chapter Twenty Four coming once it's ready. I'll see you all again after a little while. Thanks for reading.

Chapter Twenty Four: Brewing

Harry had just returned from breakfast, with Ginny, Luna, and Neville following closely behind him. Based on the talk in the Great Hall, one would think there was some ground breaking event that shattered foundations of the Wizarding World. Of course, there could have been that decree that Harry passed though the other day, but perhaps he was just guessing incorrectly. Sure enough, Dolores Umbridge had marched up to Harry and just going by the look on her face, it was obvious that she was trying not to lose her composure. With each decree Harry and the majority of prefects that supported him pushed though and each decree that was blocked that Umbridge tried to introduce, Harry could see she was closer and closer to the breaking point. There was a betting pool going on in the D.A. about how long it would take for Harry to break Umbridge.

“Mr. Potter,” said Umbridge crisply.

“Yes, Dolores,” answered Harry sweetly, as behind his back, Luna, Neville, and Ginny were barely able to keep a straight face at the sour look that appeared on Umbridge’s face when Harry addressed her in such a way. It was highly amusing to say the least.

“The new decree that you pushed though last evening was rather...intriguing,” answered Umbridge as if she had struggled to find the correct words to describe what she thought of Harry’s latest piece of work. “I want to know why exactly you would take such a distract step.”

“Well, I’ll be happy to give you the same reason that I gave the Minister of Magic before he gave me his blessing, before I proposed it to the prefects,” answered Harry with a smug look. “Let’s say the break period before lunch, I know you don’t have a class then.”

“Yes, Mr. Potter, you would be correct,” answered Umbridge shortly, as she wondered what Potter could have been thinking about this one.

“Then it’s settled, I’ll give you my rationale, I think you’re find that you will agree with it,” answered Harry as he left the implication that

Umbridge had no choice because of the agreement that he had tricked her into signing hanging. Umbridge just responded with a quick nod before she walked off to teach her first class, in a bit of a bad mood.

"I'm glad I'm not taking Defense Against the Dark Arts this morning, Umbridge looks positively foul," remarked Luna.

"I thought that was her natural look," responded Ginny, which caused all four of them to laugh, as they prepared to go their separate ways for class. They had a big D.A. meeting planned for later that day, as many students had been spurred to work harder because of the mass Azkaban breakup, so Harry decided it would be best to take advantage of this newly spurned ambition to learn as much as they can.

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"Come in Mr. Potter and have a seat," prompted Umbridge as Harry entered the office, with a calm look on his face, as if he thought he was completely in control. Harry sat in the chair in front of Umbridge's office. "I must offer my confusion about the recent decree you had passed though. I can't believe that the prefects would go through with such a thing."

"Well, not all of them did, but once I explained my reasoning, enough did, with the exception of the usual suspects, it's almost like they're out to sabotage me, but of course, I'm above making such accusations," responded Harry as Umbridge just nodded behind her desk. "Now I'm sure you want to hear the same reasoning that I've given the Minister of Magic, before I made it official."

"Yes, Mr. Potter, please enlighten me," responded Umbridge in a forced voice and Harry took a deep breath but Umbridge added something. "Because I don't think it's a good idea to encourage such behavior."

"What type of behavior? Being afraid of a dead person," answered Harry and Umbridge just looked at him with a start. "Am I incorrect in

saying that the official Ministry of Magic stance on Lord Voldemort is that he's dead?"

"Yes, Mr. Potter, you would not be mistaken," said Umbridge swiftly. "I fail to think..."

"If he's dead, that means there's nothing to fear, at most he should be able to return as a ghost and I doubt he'll be able to do much damage, other than causing a few people to wet their pants by sneaking up on them," responded Harry as he looked at Umbridge without blinking. "It's time we stop coddling the Wizarding World and encouraging this silly fear of the name of a dead person. It causes people to lose confidence in the Ministry, one of the driving forces why we encounter so much resistance from Muggleborns. Once they see us cowering at a name, it makes us look pathetic. They're laughing at our fear of a simple name. The man behind the name, yes, obviously we should have feared him when he was alive, but now he's not alive any longer. I have the scar to prove it, trust me. Do you want to work for a Ministry that is seen as a laughing stock because of a fear of a simple name?"

Umbridge refused to respond. Potter had had an explanation for everything and it had infuriated her to no end. The Minister refused to move against the boy, he enjoyed the donations too much, he had the Wizengamot eating out of the palm of his hand, the Daily Prophet had never said a bad word against him, and the Hogwarts Board of Governors had deferred pretty much all recent decisions regarding Hogwarts to him.

"It's time for us to cease fearing the ghosts of the past, Voldemort's dead and even if he wasn't, I'm not scared of a name," responded Harry. "I know exactly what he was."

"Do you, Mr. Potter?" asked Umbridge skeptically. "What is your motive in all of this?"

"To lift the curtain of fear that Voldemort has dropped on the Wizarding World, nothing more, his specter haunts us to this day," answered Harry evasively, but really he did want to remove Voldemort's number one weapon. The fear he inspired by the fact he

was a mysterious figure that few knew or understood. He had casually slipped out Voldemort's real name but he would do much more when he returned for real. "What's going to happen when the next dark lord comes along? Are we going to be too petrified to say his name too? When's this going to stop? Will the Ministry coddle everyone forever by encouraging the fear? At Hogwarts, I plan to show everyone that no matter what Voldemort was, a really powerful wizard, sure, a dangerous force, true, but he was and always will be just a man with a cult of devoted followers. He is not a god, he's just more powerful than most and it's no reason to fear even speaking his name. Are my reasons clear to you now?"

"As clear as you're going to ever allow me to understand, Mr. Potter," said Umbridge, who had hoped Granger would find out something soon, because she sure was not getting closer.

"Glad to see you get the picture," responded Harry, who knew Umbridge was getting more frustrated by the moment, so he prepared to take precautions. There was nothing more dangerous than a cornered animal, except for maybe a cornered politician. "If there are no further questions, than I'll be going. I have important work that I need to get to. O. are approaching after all."

"Right of course, Mr. Potter, you're dismissed," said Umbridge, even though by the time she said anything, Harry was already out the door and into the corridor by the time she talked. The High Inquisitor sighed, once again, Potter appeared to have all of the answers. He was too dangerous but also too well protected. It seemed like there was never a time where he was in the corridor alone, the rare times he had been seen in the corridor. Right now, she would much rather deal with the politicians in the Ministry of Magic, at least they were pretty much one dimensional and easy to read. Their aims were obvious, to maintain their own status and power within the Ministry, while stepping on as many important toes as they were allowed to. Potter on the other hand, had not directly maneuvered against anyone, well in the traditional sense anyway. His decrees, while in the surface he had claimed they were designed to help the Ministry, appeared to be parts of a larger puzzle that Dolores had not pieced together.

For the first time, Dolores briefly considered the idea that Dumbledore had been right and He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named had returned. Even if it blatantly contradicted Ministry policy, it did explain this latest decree, but also raise many more questions. What did Potter have to gain have to gain by not directly saying that He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named returned? It did not make any sense, so despite the fact it briefly popped in her head, Dolores discouraged the idea that Dumbledore had been right immediately. It just did not make any sense based on what she knew about Potter, he was proactive and thus, he would make sure as many people would know about the return as possible. Just keeping what he saw in the graveyard silent did not make any sense. Yet, he had to be up to something.

So, what was Potter's game?

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"The Shield Charm is an important tool to use in battle, but one that can be easily broken under too many circumstances," lectured Harry during a D.A. Meeting, as everyone gathered around to await the instructions. "Relying on it can be foolish, but it can defend against most spells. Unfortunately, Death Eaters don't use most spells. They favor the Unforgiveable Curses which a shield charm unfortunately can't block. Even I doubt I could block the Unforgiveables with a shield charm, not that I'm in any hurry to try."

There were nods and a couple of snickers, but not many, as Harry stood, obviously he had their attention.

"I realize this might be a repeat of material spoken by the imposter Moody last year at Hogwarts, but it's also important for you to remember this, the only curse that can be completely countered out of the three is the Imperius Curse, if you have a stronger will than the caster," explained Harry. "The Cruciatus Curse is not a pleasant one, as even a few minutes under it can lead to the potential of irreversible mental damage. The Killing Curse, well, unless you prey for a cosmic one in a million magical fluke like it happened in my case, you really don't have much of a chance blocking that one with magic. Now, it's been proven that solid objects will block it. Using an enemy as a human shield can also work, but only if your reflexes are quick

enough to react in seconds. In any event, your time would be better spent by getting out of the way of those spells in time.”

“Also, the shield charm can be broken,” offered Ginny. “Not only by spells more powerful than the shield, but there are other tricks that can be used to weaken the shields.”

“Yes, as Ginny said, there are many ways that a shield charm can be broken, a number of spells striking the shield simultaneously could do the job nicely,” said Harry. “Now the stronger the shield the more spells it will take to crack it but if it’s broken, you better be ready to fight soon. By the time you can get your shield back up, your opponent could already throw a deadly attack at you. Today, we will divide you into groups of three or four, depending on your years. One member of the group will use a shield charm, while the other members of the group will try and hit it with enough spells to break the shield charm. The teamwork exercises that we’ve been working on for all of these months will come in handy here, as your timing needs to be exactly right and as for the shield charms, everyone mastered them sufficiently enough to try this exercise. This will also test exactly who has the strongest shields.”

Without another word, Daphne, Susan, Luna, Neville, Ginny, and Harry all paired up the groups and watched them all around. Some of them had their shields broken with one attack. Some had maintained the shields but only because the attacks had been a half of a second out of sync. Others yet had managed to keep a shield up under multiple attacks before it failed and they instinctively fired back a stunning spell or two rather than return to the shield charm. That brought a smile to Harry’s face, as he took a few notes on who stood out and who needed more practice on certain areas. The other leaders of the D.A. took notes as well, as they had their own ideas as well. As the meeting wore to an end, Harry walked around, with the others, to offer suggestions on how to improve their techniques with both the shields and breaking the shields.

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“I think we’re making progress as we’ve been with every meeting so far,” answered Harry as they all nodded, after they had just

completed comparing notes of their observations during the meeting. "The teamwork aspect was a bit tough to get down at first, but that's where the most noticeable improvements are and the one thing that will separate us from the Death Eaters."

"You said you had some information about the Elder Wand that might get us closer to finding out what it is," said Neville.

"Well, closer than we were anywhere, which is I still have no idea who has it now, but the last recorded user was two hundred and fifty years ago," said Harry.

"There have been breaks in the records of who has had the wand before and it's turned up before," said Luna.

"The wand's older than Hogwarts, I think there was times where it would go missing," said Daphne. "Who's to say that the wand's even in this country? It could be anywhere..."

"No, it's here, don't ask me how I know, but something's told me I've seen it before," answered Harry as he tried to remember where it was. A powerful wand such as the Elder Wand would be something that he felt he should have easily recalled where he had seen it but that was far from the case.

"Well we do have the other two Hallows," said Neville.

"A start," agreed Harry, as he had not spent all of his time and resources in looking for the Elder Wand, so it was not as if it was a priority. If the entire set was out there where anyone could get them, Harry would be more worried. Since they were not and Harry had the stone locked up safely, along with the Invisibility Cloak in his trunk, he did not worry too much about it. "The wand is somewhere, we do know that. Until we know who has it or where it is, there's not much we could do. The D.A. is our priority more than anything. With thirteen of Voldemort's most dangerous followers broken out of Azkaban, people need to learn how to defend themselves now more than ever, at least long enough for them to get away."

“And who knows how many more people he’s secretly recruited by now,” said Susan with a shudder.

“More will come once he officially makes his presence known,” added Harry darkly, but in time, he hoped to take steps to discourage people to join Voldemort. Given his peaks into Snape’s mind, Voldemort was still fixated on the prophecy and sooner rather than later, he would take steps to get it.

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Astoria Greengrass was both frustrated and happy. Frustrated by the fact that no matter what she did, Draco Malfoy never seemed to know that she existed. What he saw in Parkinson she would never know, she had a voice like a dying cat in a hailstorm and she always had a superior look on her face like she was too good for the world.

On the bright side, she enjoyed the time she spent in the D.A. When she heard that Harry Potter was teaching the defense study group, she was skeptical that she would learn anything of value. It was Harry Potter, the golden boy of the Gryffindor house. She thought he would be a closed minded disciple of Dumbledore. A naïve boy that would only teach spells that would only barely have a possible change of harming someone. Of course, as any true Slytherin would point out, any spell, even the so called harmless ones, could be used to give an enemy an injury. Still, she went to that first meeting, after Daphne basically blackmailed her into doing it and was glad that she did. Over the past several months, she learned all kinds of new spells. Astoria was not a bookworm by any means, but she did have a fairly decent understanding of curses, hexes, and jinxes. Their parents made sure her and Daphne knew enough to defend themselves, as it was obvious they would get sorted into Slytherin at a young age, as all the other members of their family had.

Still, what she learned was nothing compared to what Harry was able to teach them. The other leaders of the group offered their input and their own unique ideas, but Harry really drove the group. Without him, the D.A. would not have made the progress they did. Harry was really someone that might exactly succeed. Others had tried and failed to inspire revolution, but they thought they could do it on their own,

without help. That's where they failed in the end. Harry on the other always seemed to leave room for the input of others and made decisions accordingly.

"Potter, he always gets in my way!" ranted Draco to no one in particular as he made his way up the stairs towards the Slytherin Common Room. "Now he's encouraged those Mud-Muggleborns to say his name by that decree and their saying it all over the castle without fear, just to prove that they can. We can't even put him into their place, because Potter has his little goon squad getting an eye out for anyone who has a proper wizard mind set."

"You know, I doubt that Harry was directly doing anything against you when he had those decrees passed through," said Astoria quietly and Draco turned to her, eyes narrowed.

"Decided to be one of his groupies now, Greengrass?" asked Draco coldly.

"No, but I'm telling you that Harry really doesn't consider you, you're below his notice," said Astoria carefully but this only enraged Draco even more.

"I suppose Potter's now polluting the minds of the Slytherin house now, Gryffindor wasn't enough for him, he now has to ruin the only safe haven away from his...views," said Draco. "I thought you of all people wouldn't fall for his rubbish, you've called him nothing but a pompous scar faced overrated hack for four years."

"Yes, but that's before I actually talked to him, he's nothing like you think he is, but I'm forbidden to tell you exactly what he is, maybe you should ask him yourself," said Astoria. "People think you're a self centered arrogant bastard who wears too much hair gel..."

"Enough, Potter was the one who snubbed me for Weasley on the train, he was the arrogant one who acted like he was too good," answered Draco. "Besides, it's not like he's going to last much longer, Potter will pay for his defilement of the Wizarding World."

"Oh, really Draco, is that what you think or is that something that Lucius force fed to you?" challenged Astoria, as one of the few things she hated about Draco is his complete inability to have his own opinion beyond his father's. Draco had already been talking about how Muggles needed to be put in their place because of their arrogance before he went to Hogwarts, but yet Draco was never taken outside of Malfoy Manor or the pureblood homes of Lucius's pureblood friends. "Honestly Draco, when are you going to grow up and stop listening to Daddy."

"I don't need to here this from you, blood traitor!" shouted Draco angrily but Astoria smiled, as she realized she had touched a nerve and maybe had gotten Draco thinking. Besides he was so cute when he was angry.

"Draco, are you okay, I heard your voice?" asked the voice of Pansy Parkinson who walked up with Crabbe and Goyle, who had their arms folded with stupid looks on their face. Pansy's eyes narrowed when she saw Astoria standing there. "What are you doing here, Greengrass?"

"Talking to Draco," responded Astoria coolly. "That's not a problem, is it, Parkinson?"

"Come Draco, we don't have any time for blood traitors," said Pansy as Draco just turned his back on Astoria without acknowledging her. Crabbe and Goyle stood there for a couple of seconds before they walked off.

Astoria sighed. Draco was being lead in a bad direction by the wrong people. He already had a lot to live up to because of his father, Draco did not want to make the Malfoy name look bad. Now he was in with a group of people that were the same mold of the people that needed to be removed if change was to be made. She hoped that something she said got through to Draco, but doubted it very much. It was useless to get too hung up about anything, Parkinson had him wrapped around her little finger.

“Brilliant Ginny,” said Harry as they had returned to their private room in the Chamber of Secrets after another crushing Quidditch victory over Hufflepuff. Once again, they stuck around only long enough for the rest of the Gryffindor house to congratulate them. “Those Chasers were so frustrated by the end, that all of their throws were off balance. You didn’t even need to try towards the end.”

“Well that catch you made at the end was brilliant as well,” responded Ginny with a shrug, truly the dive that Harry was spectacular. Not that many people could have controlled their descent at the rate Harry did but he managed to blast past the Hufflepuff Seeker, while grabbing the Snitch.

“Well we all did well in that game,” answered Harry, but Ginny stepped closer to him.

“Yes, but as nice as that victory was, I think what we’re going to do right now is going to be much better than any Quidditch victory,” answered Ginny, as she placed her hands on Harry’s. “The celebration is always better than the victory anyway.”

“Agreed, especially when the celebration is with you Ginny,” responded Harry with a triumphant smile as he pulled Ginny close to him, so their faces were an inch apart, their arms tightly around each other, as they sank down onto the bed, before they began to kiss each other passionately. Between the heavy amount of Quidditch matches and the D.A. meetings they had, they did not have too much time to themselves. They made the most of the opportunity, as the intensity of the kisses increased, as clothes began to get removed, as everything got heated. The further they got, the more power they felt though their exchanges of love.

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Hermione stormed down the hallways. She could not stand to be in the Gryffindor Common Room for another minute, to hear about how great Ginny Weasley was, how she was so perfect that not one Quaffle was let in. Hermione looked around. It had been a couple of months since Umbridge had asked her to get information on Harry. Yet, despite the fact that Hermione had spent most of her free time

looking into this, there was no hint of what Harry was up to. She tried to follow Harry and his so called friends, but every time she got close, they appeared to disappear. If Harry used the Marauder's Map, there would be no way that Hermione could find him. It was not like Hermione could even go through the trunk in the Common Room again, as Harry had not even slept in his dormitory for months. In fact, neither did Ginny and where they managed to sleep together without getting caught was something that Hermione was obsessed with finding out. There was nowhere in the castle that she could think of, at least where the teachers would not have found out.

Hermione wondered what had happened to the Harry she knew. He would not even look in her direction and she could not get close enough to get his attention either, as there were crowds of people surrounding him. Harry would have annoyed by this in the past, but he was not bothered at all this time. Once she tried to step close, more than a few people gave her looks as if she was lower then mud and had drawn their wands, as if they were going to attack her. It was almost like the entire school was against her, to try and keep her away from Harry.

Also, Umbridge had hinted more and more that her patience with Hermione was about to run out. The feeling was more than mutual, as Hermione had to resist ripping into Umbridge more than a few times. A small logical part of her brain reminded her that Umbridge, despite the fact that Harry was more powerful inside the school, was still an extremely powerful Ministry of Magic official and the overall feeling of Muggleborns was very poor. The changes that Harry made though the educational decrees that he passed through had eased most of the taunting inside the walls, but outside of the school, the hatred was more prominent than ever before.

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It was the middle part of April, as Harry had just concluded a rather bland, routine meeting of the Wizengamot. Just a couple of weeks ago, the Occlumency lessons that he had with Snape ceased, as Snape had claimed that he taught everything he could to him and sent him off. In other words, Snape had decided that he learned enough about the connection that Dumbledore thought Harry shared

with Voldemort and decided not to waste time. As much as Harry detested Snape and wanted to limit his interactions with the traitorous coward as much as possible, it was a bit disheartening to lose his source of information with the two men that he wanted to keep an eye on the most.

The Ministry was no closer to capturing the Death Eaters that escaped or Dumbledore for that matter. As Harry had found at, at least a quarter of the Ministry either was a Death Eater or was sympathetic to Voldemort's cause, a good number of them had high ranking jobs. One of his long term goals was to find a way to cause these people to lose stature within the Ministry, before he replaced them with those who would not be easily coerced to believe the demented opinions of Voldemort.

"Harry, good to see you again, it's been too long," said Fudge in a jovial voice. "I've heard you've been keeping busy, with that Junior Inquisitor position, all the positive changes that have occurred in Hogwarts leads to a very promising future."

"Not to toot my own horn, but the Potions grades averages have risen thanks to the adjustments that was forced on Snape's teaching style, conflicts related on blood status have dropped, and there have been less detentions issued there has in previous years," answered Harry. "Of course, Madam Umbridge has done her share of work, the Defense Against the Dark Arts classes do an admirable job in getting everyone where they need to be."

"Glad you think that Harry, I think this Inquisitor experiment was a success," said Fudge. "I don't know what Dolores was thinking when she tried to appoint herself as Headmistress. Your appointment of Minerva McGonagall was much more logical, as while Dolores has had a positive effect on Hogwarts, she is rather inexperienced still. I know she wanted to get the position filled, but it could have caused Hogwarts to take a step backwards."

"Besides, between the Defense Against the Dark Arts classes, High Inquisitor, and the potential job as Hogwarts Headmistress, it was too much, we wouldn't want Madam Umbridge to crack, would we," said Harry, even though that's exactly what he wanted to see.

"Too true, Harry," responded Fudge with a nod of his head, as they prepared to step into the Minister's office but before that could happen, Rufus Scrimgeour rushed down the hallway, brushing past Harry, with a frantic look on his face.

"Minister, there's been a security breach on the lower levels of the east wing of the Ministry, someone has blocked us from going down there," said Scrimgeour in a frantic voice. "My men have tried to break through, but whoever has broken in there has placed a barrier where we can't get down there. Someone's tampered with the wards."

Fudge looked grave. If someone had tampered with the wards on that end., the only way to get down there was through the private left on the east wing of the Ministry and the Minister of Magic was the only one who had access to that particular navigational path through the Ministry.

"I'll just show myself out, Minister, while you take care of the security breach," said Harry and Fudge just went off, following Scrimgeour without a word. Rather than leaving, Harry slipped inside the office, before he removed a piece of parchment from his pocket. "I solemnly swear I'm still not up to any good."

Over the past year, Harry made sure to learn as much as he could about the layout of the Ministry of Magic, so he could piece together one of his greatest creations. Much like the Marauder's Map had detailed what was going on in Hogwarts. This new map showed what was going on in the Ministry of Magic and who was on the move. It took him a while to gather all the necessary information to create an accurate map of the Ministry, but the charms only took a few weeks, mostly with help of Sirius and Remus. His eyes travelled to the Department of Mysteries, which was far away from the source of the disturbance as possible and his eyes widened. A group of dots, about twenty of them that he could count, perhaps more as not all of the kinks had been worked out of the map yet, were lurking around outside of the Hall of Prophecy. Harry reached over and spoke into his wrist.

"Ginny, I think the D.A. meeting will be postponed tonight, something's come up," answered Harry. "As in the fact there is at least twenty Death Eaters lurking outside of the Department of Mysteries, after a certain Prophecy. There may be more"

"I wonder if Voldemort tried to give you a vision over the connection that doesn't exist," answered Ginny, as they had gone over this possibility so many times that it was just not a matter of if it would happen, it was when it would happen.

"Perhaps, he doesn't really consider that he might have failed to lure me here," said Harry. "I need to head down there soon to maintain appearances, he's already diverted the attention of the Aurors away with a fake disturbance. Fudge too, it's scary how accurately we predicted what would happen."

"Everyone's here though, we're just waiting for you to get back," answered Ginny. "What should I tell them?"

"Well, if they want to get a little practical experience, bring as many people you can get here within the next ten minutes, but impress on them that this is the real deal, not just practice," said Harry. "Also those robes that Fred and George have created, with the enchanted hoods, equip anyone who wants to come with them. I'm not willing to have anyone who's on my side exposed just yet. I'm going to head down to the Department of Mysteries in a few minutes, but take the Floo to the Minister of Magic's office and meet me down there."

"Right Harry, I just relayed it to the others, we'll get it taken care of and get there as soon as we can," said Ginny but Harry detected a hint of worry in her voice.

"Thanks Ginny," answered Harry, as he pointed his wand towards the window, before he prepared to create six separate messenger Patroni to send to the former Aurors under his employ, to give him the added help he needed. "Intruders in the Department of Mysteries, I need back up, you'll learn what's going on when you get here."

Harry watched as his messengers went off. He then slipped off. He expected Dumbledore to show up once word had reached him that

there was a security breach in the Ministry, but as usual, Dumbledore would wait until the last minute, so he could look to be the hero. Harry had plans to stall Dumbledore long enough so he could do things his way.

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Lucius Malfoy smiled as he heard footsteps approaching the Hall of Prophecies.

"Predictable, he's fallen into the trap just as the Dark Lord has said," said Lucius with a smug smile as he watched the boy make his way forward, before he turned to the twenty five other Death Eaters that stood behind him, as they held their wands, all wanting to prove themselves to their master, by being the one to capture Potter and present both him and the prophecy to the Dark Lord. "Everyone prepare to move in, he's approaching the shelf."

Harry stepped forward.

"We're right in position Harry," muttered Ginny's voice over the communication connection for the Portkey. "Your six Aurors have arrived just now. We're just waiting for you to give us the signal."

"Good, in a couple of minutes, stand by," muttered Harry in a barely audible voice as he extended his hand out as if he was reaching for the fake copy of the prophecy, he could feel the breath of the Death Eaters lurking in the shadows nearby. It was almost like they expected him to be distracted by something not to notice their obvious presence. He had lifted the orb off the shelf.

"All right Potter, turn around and hand over the orb," ordered Lucius but as he saw Potter turn around, he did not have a look of fear or confusion on his face, he had a wide ear to ear smile on his face, despite the fact he was faced with twenty six Death Eaters.

Ah, the wonders of universe altering events. The attack is moved up a couple of months and there are many more Death Eaters. Of course, Harry has more people on his side too. A bit of a filler chapter until we get to the real excitement of the next chapter.

Yes, Harry just happening to be at the Ministry at this time was a bit convoluted but we have to keep the story moving. :)

Chapter Twenty Five: Rumble

Harry turned to the Death Eaters, he could not help a smile forming on his face. It was obvious through their arrogance, they thought he had walked directly into a trap, but on the contrary, the trap was sprung on the Death Eaters.

“Hand it over Potter,” ordered Lucius calmly, as the other Death Eaters took a couple of steps back. For some reason, it appeared that a smile appearing on the face of the person that they were supposed to trap unnerved them. It was mostly because many of them were present in the graveyard when Potter had fought the Dark Lord and he had held his own.

“Good afternoon Lucius, long time no see,” responded Harry calmly, as if he felt there was no danger at all, as he took in the Death Eater robes and mask the pompous pureblood had on. “And you’ve worn your Sunday best as well, charming, indeed. What can I do for you?”

“The orb Potter, hand it over,” repeated Lucius as he was well aware that Potter was now playing an absent minded game of catch with himself, as he tossed the orb up and down. If they had struck Potter, the orb would smash to the ground. Lucius kept a weary eye on some of the more hex happy Death Eaters, he knew they would attack too soon if Potter had baited them too much.

“The ickle baby obviously wants to know where is godfather is, look at him, trying to put on a brave face, even though he’s scared, ah the poor whittle baby,” cooed Bellatrix in a baby voice that caused Harry to want to impale a spike into her head.

“So it appears to me that your master used my godfather as bait to lure me here, to get me this glass orb, a vision of him being tortured,” said Harry, as he read Lucius’s mind, the man obviously thought this flimsy Occlumency shields could keep someone out but there were obvious flaws that someone with enough time and patience could exploit to their fullest. “Then he expected me to rush here, wand ready, to look for Sirius and just hope I luckily stumble onto this room, with this orb and just I happen to lift it off the shelf. I just have one question. How stupid does Voldemort think I am?”

"You filthy little half blood, you have no right to speak the Dark Lord's name!" shrieked Bellatrix angrily, as she was offended by the disrespect shown to the Dark Lord and what was worse, those eyes were staring back at her. Those green eyes that caused her so much pain and agony, the same eyes she wanted to tear out and stomp on. It was obvious to Bella that the boy was as disrespectful as his mother.

"What name? Voldemort?" asked Harry in a would be innocent tone of voice and several wands were pointed towards Harry but Lucius had turned towards his fellow Death Eaters, with a shield charm up, as a couple of spells were aimed towards Harry.

"No you fools, Potter cannot be attacked until he hands over the prophecy, if that orb smashes it will be all of our necks on the line," said Lucius, as he wanted to get the orb intact, as the Dark Lord had implied this was his last chance and if Lucius failed, he would be killed slowly and painfully. "The orb Potter, hand it over and we'll make this a little less painful on you."

"Speak for yourself," muttered Bellatrix under her breath.

"Bellatrix, enough," said Lucius sternly. "The orb Potter and we can end this without bloodshed."

"Once again, Lucius, exactly how stupid do you think I am?" asked Harry as he was getting bored with this entire game but the Death Eaters just stood, many of them looked to be a movement away from throwing some deadly curse at that boy.

"Obviously Potter, you're not as resourceful as people think you to be, as you walked directly into a trap, alone," answered Lucius smugly.

"Much like with your wife, Lucius, you simply don't get it," responded Harry which caused Bellatrix to cackle madly at the slight that Potter made against her brother-in-law. "I'm in a good mood so I think I'll keep the prophecy and you all disown Voldemort, before you swear your undying loyalty to me."

"We'll never bow down to a filthy half blood, Potter!" shouted one of the Death Eaters as Harry broke out in an insane round of laughter at the utter irony of this statement. He could not stop laughing and he just was barely able to keep the prophecy steady.

"So funny, on so many levels," answered Harry as he struggled to breath and the Death Eaters looked to be getting a bit anxious and he knew it would not be long before the curses started coming. He was ready to signal for help when things got really ugly but right now, he was getting in the heads of the Death Eaters. It would make them sloppy and prone to mistakes that he, the D.A. and the Aurors could exploit when it came time. "By the way, your so called champion of blood purists, Lord Voldemort is really nothing but a half blood. Not only that, but he is the bastard son of a Muggle and a squib."

"SHUT UP POTTER!" shouted one of the Death Eaters as many of them grumbled in irritation of what Potter was doing.

"STOP SLANDERING THE NAME OF THE DARK LORD!" shrieked Bellatrix Lestrange as she was about ready to strangle Potter. She saw those eyes, taunting her, tormenting her, causing her to flash back to the great pain she suffered in the past. They haunted her of failures of the past.

"The truth is more painful than anything that I can fabricate," said Harry as he tossed the Prophecy around, looking bored. "So while your bastard half blood master decides to send all twenty six of you to do his dirty work, he sits around without even bothering to get his hands dirty. The fact that he needs twenty six of you, says one of two things. Either he thinks highly of my abilities or he thinks so little off you that he figures no one of you could even handle a fifteen year wizard who has not even taken his Ordinary Wizarding Level exams yet. Not that it matters anyway, each of you are just nameless, faceless tools to Voldemort that can be replaced"

Harry continued to toss the prophecy up and down in his hand. He could see that even the most level headed Death Eaters were having trouble keeping their tempers in check and Harry knew that his plan had just about run its course. Still, he could not resist digging the knife into the wounds he created just a little deeper.

"In fact, I think the reason Voldemort refused to come here today, because he knew I could beat him and didn't want to suffer an embarrassment of failing to kill an underage wizard...again," said Harry with a smug smile on his face, as Lucius and others had to step in front of a group of Death Eaters, who looked like they wanted to rip into Harry. "Many of you were there in the graveyard. Voldemort was unconscious and I walked out of there, with his wand as well. I'm sure he was not too happy about that."

"Potter, you are stretching your patience thin, but if you hand over the orb there will be..." stated Lucius.

"No need for bloodshed," finished Harry dully, as he threw the orb up and down into the air as he held his wand for the ready. "See here's the thing, you're going to have to pry this orb out of my cold lifeless hands if you want it and I'm not going to give you a chance."

Before any of the Death Eaters could react, Harry pulled off two spells at once. One sent a blast of blinding light into the hallway, that backed them off and the other sent out brief magically simulated sonic vibrations that caused the ears of the Death Eaters to ring.

"NOW!" shouted Harry into the Portkey and several spells shot into the hallway. A couple of unfortunate Death Eaters were stunned immediately while others spun around as several of shadowed figures moved as both their hearing and vision returned to them.

"Potter's not come alone," said one of the Death Eaters. "There's a..."

The Death Eater was silenced before he fell to the ground and Lucius turned to realize that Potter had slipped off in the confusion, as the Death Eaters turned, wands ready, as several footsteps were heard in the distance, as there appeared to be figures in the darkened Hall of Prophecies that circled the Death Eaters.

"They're surrounding us, whoever they are, don't get distracted, we need Potter, get him and the Prophecy, take out anyone you can, but don't toy with them," ordered Lucius as he looked at Bellatrix after he spoke these words.

A barrage of spells struck the side of a shelf and the shelf tipped over. Luckily for the Death Eaters nearby, they were able to avoid the shelf smashing on them but several prophecies shattered open and the spectral forms seeped out.

“Seal off the exits!” ordered Lucius as he moved over, wand drawn as he stalked in the direction of the noise. “They can’t have gone far and get Potter, now!”

Harry was just a few feet away from where he stood, underneath the Invisibility Cloak. He snickered, as the Death Eaters searched around for him. It was pathetic, considering how he had not moved an inch since he had spent those two spells into the air. He had the Map of the Ministry in his hand, as he watched the Death Eaters spread out into different rooms of the Department of Mysteries. This was too perfect, it appeared his enemies had split their forces into smaller groups that would be easier to defeat. It was not like it would be hard to divide and conquer. He looked at the map, at least forty of his D.A. members had showed up, along with the Aurors and it appeared that Sirius and Remus had tagged along for the ride as well, even though Harry did not inform them.

Quickly, Harry removed the cloak as the most of the Hall of the Prophecies had been emptied except for one of the Death Eaters, a seedy looking man by the name of Phillips. The Death Eater opened his mouth to speak but a silent silencing charm had stopped the Death Eater from calling his friends back. The Death Eater pulled out his wand but Harry disarmed him effortlessly, Another blasting spell knocked his opponent into a shelf of prophecies, the crash no doubt attracted the attentions of those who might have been nearby. As a result, Harry wrapped it up by shooting a net out of his wand that wrapped tightly around the Death Eater. A thick chain wrapped around the net to tightly keep Phillips in place. At the sound of footsteps, Harry ducked behind a shelf of prophecies as he saw a masked Death Eater. He consulted the map to see that it was Crabbe. Crabbe looked around and Harry implemented the same holographic spell that he used in the lake during the Second Task to distract the mer-people from what was really going on.

“Potter, thought you could sneak off from me,” grunted Crabbe as he followed the figure that he thought to be Potter down a corridor, where a group of D.A. members lead by Neville were.

“Neville, Death Eater coming your way, shouldn’t be too hard to contain this one,” said Harry over the Portkey.

“Right, Harry, we see him,” said Neville as Harry stuck around just long enough to hear his response before he made his way down the hallway, where Sirius, Remus, and Tonks were battling with a quartet of Death Eaters and the other Aurors appeared to be having their problems with the Lestrage trio not too far away. Harry edged closer, to join the fun on that end of the Department of Mysteries.

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Crabbe stumbled down the corridor of the Department of Mysteries, as he looked from side to side.

“Potter come out and hand me that orb thing!” said Crabbe but a trio of stunning spells had knocked him right off of his feet. He could not think quickly enough block the spells and he was slammed up and down. He crashed with a solid thud as Neville motioned for the other members of the D.A. with him to walk into the picture.

“Harry was right, this one was easy to take down, secure him just in case more are around here,” said Neville and ropes shot around Crabbe, before he was placed next to the wall with a sticking charm. It was possible to get him down, but it would take several minutes and another charm ensured that they would be notified the minute someone tried to tamper with the sticking charm placed on Crabbe. It would easily lure any Death Eaters lurking around into a trap where they could be easily attacked.

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Harry moved forward, as he watched as three of the four Death Eaters that Remus, Sirius, and Tonks had already been fighting had been knocked out of commission. Another one appeared to be rather illusive and as he checked the map, Rookwood was this opponent. It

did make sense, as he had previously worked in the Department of Mysteries, so if anyone would know the layout it would be him.

“Watch your back Remus!” shouted Harry suddenly as a sickly yellow blast of fire from the direction of where Rookwood was standing, was aimed right at Remus. Harry’s warning allowed Remus to block the spell and it also gave up Rookwood’s positioning which allowed Harry to throw a stunning spell, Rookwood managed to block that but unfortunately it left him open from a Sirius attack. A jagged light struck Rookwood right in the wand arm. Bones cracking were heard and Rookwood fell to his knees in pain, as a blue light struck him in the chest, as he fell back, his body on the ground at a crooked angle.

“Hello Harry, fancy seeing you here,” said Sirius as he watched Harry gift wrap Rookwood for the inevitable moment that the Aurors had discovered that the disturbance they were looking into was a fake.

“I could say the same about you, Sirius,” said Harry calmly.

“Well Tonks just happened to stop by for a chat, when you sent your little message, the more wands the merrier right,” said Sirius as he paused to hear the insane gleeful laughter of his cousin in the distance. “We better help the others, Bellatrix can be quite unpredictable and dangerous.”

“So I’ve heard,” answered Harry as he checked the map. “Looks like Ginny, Luna, and their group are having some trouble with a small group lead by Dolohov. I should give them a hand myself but Sirius, do stay out of trouble.”

“When have I gotten myself into trouble?” asked Sirius but Harry had already gone before he had a chance to answer. Sirius shrugged, as he followed Remus and Tonks. The shrieks in the hallway and the cackles by Bellatrix indicated that she was making sport of the Aurors and that was one of her glaring weaknesses. His cousin could never resist a chance to showboat and that would lead to her downfall. Still all three Lestranges were equally dangerous, so this was not a battle to be taken lightly.

Two of the members of the D.A. had been teleported away when a near fatal spell had almost struck them. Ginny breathed a sigh of relief, at least they knew those charms on the robes worked, to get the wearers out of danger. They were back in the Room of Requirement, safe and sound. Shaken up sure, but at least they would still be one piece and safe. It was fortunate that they worked, as Fred and George only did some light testing on them when they developed them.

Of course, they were still having their problems, as Ginny managed avoid an attack by one of the Death Eaters she fought. Luna moved around, as the Death Eater that she was fighting had gotten frustrated and struggled to get in an attack on her. Fred and George disappeared into a hallway with the Death Eater they were fighting.

"I've got you now," said the Death Eater as he black bolt of light went at Ginny but Ginny moved and the curse struck the wall. A large hole was blown into it.

"INCENDIO!" shouted Ginny as she blasted the Death Eater, giving her fire a bit of extra power by speaking the curse aloud. Her opponent just barely put up a shield as intense heat filled the corridor and sparks flew everywhere. The mask was slightly burned as well as the sleeves, as the face of Dolohov was revealed beneath the damaged mask. One of the most deadly Death Eaters, Dolohov slashed his wand towards Ginny, in an attempt to hack her internal organs to shreds but a stone shield blocked it. The spell busted the shield into pieces and Ginny threw a vicious concussion curse at her enemy but Dolohov deflected the curse.

"You can't beat me alone, little girl," taunted Dolohov with a leer etched his face.

"Well she doesn't have to, Dolohov," said a voice which caused Dolohov to spin around and he was gleeful as Potter had showed up. He had worked for the Dark Lord since close to the beginning of his rise to power and now he had a chance to finally get his rightful place as the Dark Lord's most trusted follower, over the Lestranges, Snape,

Malfoy, everyone else. All he had to do was defeat this fifteen year old brat and take both him and the prophecy to the Dark Lord.

“Potter, surrender the Prophecy and I’ll let your little girlfriend go free,” said Dolohov as he turned around to grab Ginny to hold her hostage but blinked as he realized that she was standing side by side with Harry.

“You were saying?” asked Harry which prompted Dolohov to throw another organ shredding curse but both Harry and Ginny put up a shield spell that reflected the curse. Harry moved in and sent a sensory overload curse at Dolohov. Dolohov twisted his wand to repel the curse and he blocked an attack from the side from Ginny. Another organ shredding curse was avoided and Harry jabbed his wand towards Dolohov. The Death Eater screamed as it felt like fire shot through all of his nerve endings at once. He was weakened for Ginny to disarm him and Harry banish him into the wall, before shackles sprung up from the wall and snapped the Death Eater into place. Another curse saw that Dolohov would be in a catatonic state for the next couple of hours.

“That one wasn’t easy,” said Ginny as she breathed a sigh of relief at seeing Dolohov put down.

“Yep,” said Harry as he checked the map. If he was counting them right, eight Death Eaters remained standing but hopefully not for too much longer. “Looks like Nott and Goyle are giving Luna, Fred, and George some trouble, we should give them a hand.”

“Right,” said Ginny as she followed Harry, both of them with the wands at the ready. Everything was going according to plan so far but there was no time to celebrate as there was still much that can go wrong with Death Eaters still about.

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Dumbledore arrived in the Ministry of Magic, dropping down. It was just as he feared when Severus had managed to pass along the warning of Voldemort’s attempt to lure Harry to the Department of Mysteries. The attention had been diverted away from the

Department of Mysteries due to some mysterious disturbance that was likely staged by one of many Voldemort supporters that worked in the Ministry. Dumbledore stepped down and he detected a barrier placed around the entrance of the Department of Mysteries. He raised his wand and attempted to blast through, but the magical backlash caused Dumbledore to be repelled backwards towards a wall. A cushioning charm prevented a potential broken hip as Dumbledore just barely avoided slamming into the stone wall hard.

Dumbledore gazed at the barrier as he studied it intently to determine exactly what he was up against. It was magic at its most advanced. Not necessarily dark but a grey area of magic, once used by goblins as a security measure for vaults, but discarded a couple of centuries ago for being too unstable for long term use. Perfect though for a temporary security measure and it would take several minutes for him to find a way to magically disable it without setting off the fail safes.

He just hoped that Harry and any friends he brought along could last that long.

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Bellatrix was face to face with her half blood niece as she sent an attempted stunning spell at her.

"Ah come on Nymmy, you're going to have to do better than that!" cackled Bellatrix as she easily blocked the spell. She hated her niece because she grew up in a loving home with both parents alive, so Bella wanted to make her suffer.

"Just wait," said Tonks as she threw a bone shattering hex at the wand arm, much more effective than a disarming spell. Bellatrix blocked that shot and sent a burst of dangerous looking black fire that completely obliterated the shield spell that she put up to stop the attack. A second blast of black fire and Tonks just narrowly escaped being burned to a crisp. Unfortunately, this left her wide open for another spell that sliced her forearm. Tonks dropped to her knees, in pain, as blood dripped from her arm.

“Ah did that hurt whittle Nymmy Wimmy,” cooed Bellatrix as she sent another spell at Tonks who just barely blocked it. “Don’t you worry, Auntie Bella will hex it and make it worse!”

Suddenly, Tonks found herself knocked unconscious by a sleep spell. It was mostly used by frustrated parents who could not get their children to take a nap, but it worked just as well as a combat weapon as Bella just demonstrated. Now with her niece unconscious, Bella grinned, now she could have her way with Nymphadora.

A stunning spell was thrown her way and Bellatrix blocked it, before she turned around to face Kingsley Shacklebolt, blood dripping from a large gash on his face as he limped over.

“Haven’t had enough had you?” asked Bellatrix as she watched her cousin and the werewolf struggle to hold off Rodolphus and Rabastan before she turned her attention against the tough Auror. She blocked an attempt for ropes to snake around her. While Bella enjoyed being tied up, now was not the time or place. She fired a bone breaking curse right towards Shacklebolt’s skull, but unfortunately for her, the Auror blocked it before he returned fire. Even when injured, he was a skilled adversary but Bella enjoyed the challenge.

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Goyle turned with a stupid grin on his face. Potter had walked right into a trap, with the prophecy in hand. He had been busy backing up Nott against Potter’s little friends, but it looked like Nott could handle himself. Goyle snuck over, pleased that he would be moments away from being the Dark Lord’s most trusted and highest ranked follower by capturing both Potter and the prophecy.

“Alright Potter, hand over that orb right now and I’ll go easy on you,” said Goyle with a grin as he watched as the boy threw up his hands in obvious surrender.

“Alright Goyle, you got me, I knew I couldn’t defeat a top Death Eater and tactical genius, a mental giant such as yourself is no match for me, I am not worthy to be in the great presence of Gregory Goyle Senior,” said Harry with a grin as he held the glass orb. “CATCH!”

Goyle spun around stupidly to catch the prophecy before it hit the ground. If he allowed the prophecy smash, the Dark Lord would hang him by his robes. It took Goyle a second to realize that Potter had forced throwing the prophecy to the ground. This thought went through his head, before the paralyzing spell hit the base of his neck. Goyle's limbs went numb as he dropped down to the ground, only able to blink, swallow, and breath.

"That should keep you out of trouble for about six or eight hours," said Harry as Ginny was busy dueling with Nott, as both were evenly matched, with Ginny perhaps a little better in his completely biased opinion. Ginny was slightly backed up at a disadvantage and normally this would a cause for concern but Harry saw Luna sneak up behind Nott, wand raised.

"Got you now!" cackled Nott triumphantly.

"DUCK!" shouted Ginny suddenly but Nott just snorted.

"As if I'm going to fall for..." started Nott but he never finished his sentence as Luna had conjured what could only be described as a king sized rubber ducky that cracked Nott right in the back. Nott was dazed and a pair of stunning spells from either side had put him down for the count as Harry walked over to help the two girls secure him.

"You hit a Death Eater with a giant rubber ducky," dead panned Harry as he looked at Luna who was smiling.

"It worked," said Luna.

"Yes it did," answered Ginny. "Exactly how many do we have left?"

"Well, we've got the Lestrangle three, Malfoy, Jugson, and Macnair left," answered Harry.

"We've got one Harry, don't know who he is, but we've got him," said George as he walked over.

"This one put up quite a fight," said Fred as they dropped the secured Death Eater to his feet, his eyes were swelled shut.

"Macnair," said Harry, as he looked at the Death Eater who was Buckbeak's would be executioner. As tempting as it was to decapitate the man in a sense of poetic justice, Harry did not want any casualties yet. Twenty six corpses would raise too many questions, from both Dumbledore and the Ministry. They would all pay in due time but today was not that time. "Daphne, Susan, Astoria, and some others look like they have Malfoy and Jugson in a corner, which could be tricky. I'm going to see if I can give them a hand. Take this lot and put them in the same place we had the others secured."

"Okay Harry, I'll see you a little bit," responded Ginny as she gave Harry a quick kiss good bye, as she moved off as Harry slipped down the hallway, map in hand as he checked the positioning.

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"This is a man that not too long ago most of the Wizarding World lived in fear over?" taunted Rodolphus as he dueled Sirius, both of their spells clashing together as the two "Pathetic, I could roll you over just in a second flat."

Rabastan was giving Remus an equal headache as Sirius blocked a nasty little curse that would have caused his heart to speed up until he dropped dead from a heart attack. A conjured metal spike very nearly impaled Sirius but he blocked it with a split second to spare.

"Once you and the werewolf are done, I'm going to get Potter and the prophecy, and I'll be the Dark Lord's most trusted servant," taunted Rodolphus as Sirius blocked another spell that he did not recognize but he was sure it would cause much pain.

"Do you really want to talk about that with your wife in hearing distance?" asked Sirius as his head splitting hex had been just barely blocked. "You might have to sleep out the couch with your manhood removed, knowing Bella if she finds out you're trying to usurp her as Voldemort's favorite."

Rodolphus sent an explosive diarrhea hex at Sirius but Sirius blocked that one, before an ear ringing curse struck Rodolphus. He staggered back, as the ringing of invisible bells began to drive him insane. Sirius knocked Rodolphus into a wall, before ropes snaked around him and he rose up into the air.

“That should about wrap things up,” said Sirius as Rodolphus was now strung up by the ceiling. “Just hang around there until the Aurors arrive, Roddy.”

“Terrible Padfoot,” said Remus as he dodged an attack, spiked silver orbs very nearly impaling into his skin. Rabastan stood with a look on his face, as Kingsley continued to duel Bellatrix in the distance, but not for much longer, as a loud crack echoed throughout the chamber and Kingsley dropped to the ground, blood dripping from his mouth.

“Well it’s better than those Sirius/Serious jokes that James drove into the ground about three weeks into our first year,” said Sirius as he waved his wand and a blue light shaped like a giant fist appeared in mid air. Rabastan was caught off guard as he was struck in the side of the face by the Foreman hex. Rabastan was down for the count. “Looks like you needed a hand, Moony.”

“Once again, horrible, Padfoot” said Remus as he attempted to catch Bellatrix with a stunning spell but she deflected it back before she ran into the Death Chamber, a room in the Department of the Mysteries containing the illusive veil.

“Get Tonks and Kingsley out of here, they need medical attention bad,” said Sirius as he walked off where Bellatrix had gone. It was time for a nice little family reunion.

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“We just managed to get Jugson, but Malfoy fled the moment that the odds were against him,” said Susan as Harry had made his way down the hallway, as Jugson was knocked unconscious with a lump on his head.

“He went down that corridor,” added Daphne helpfully as she pointed her finger down a corridor.

“Thanks,” said Harry, who wanted to deal with Lucius personally as he walked down the corridor as he saw Lucius walk down the corridor.

“AVADA KEDAVRA!” shouted Lucius suddenly as a green jet of light was aimed right towards Potter, a desperate attack made by a desperate man and Harry dodged before the green light struck the wall.

“End of the line, Lucius,” said Harry as he used a disarming spell as a diversionary tactic before he blasted Lucius right in the eyes with a dizziness hex. Lucius staggered around, two more spells blasted towards Harry that handily ducked, before he caught Lucius right in the chest. The attack nearly knocked all the wind out of the elder Malfoy and the wand dropped from his hand. His arms and legs snapped together in a full body bind, before conjured chains tightly wrapped around Lucius. Lucius dropped to the ground before Harry sent a messenger spell down the hallway. “I’ve got Malfoy, feel free to collect him and put him with the others, I’m going to check for other Death Eaters that slipped through the cracks.”

Harry walked down as he saw Sirius approach Bellatrix in the Death Chamber. He quickened his pace as he walked, his godfather was likely to need a little bit of help against that insane woman.

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“Sirius,” said Bellatrix calmly as she saw Sirius approach. She watched her cousin with narrowed eyes.

“Bellatrix,” answered Sirius coolly as he stared down at his cousin. Right now she seemed rather calm and sedated, but she could turn into a raving lunatic within seconds. He prepared for a deadly attack in a moment’s time.

“When you didn’t take me when you left Azkaban, you hurt me, now I’m going to hurt you, Sirius,” said Bellatrix sweetly as she raised her wand. “Crucio.”

Sirius had dodged the Unforgiveable, he had seen it coming Two jagged pitch black lights aimed towards Sirius. One of them was a stomach rupturing curse and as for the other, Sirius had no clue whatsoever. A sickly yellow spiral of fire spun towards Sirius but Sirius blocked with a stone shield. The fire turned the shield to ash but Sirius was unharmed as he turned around to face Bellatrix, as he blocked a slicing curse aimed towards his throat.

“Sirius, everything that’s happened to me, it’s all your fault!” shouted Bellatrix angrily as she shot black fire at Sirius, that had spikes embedded in it. Sirius dodged.

“No one put a wand to your head and forced you to join Voldemort, Bella,” said Sirius, as he dodged another deadly spell and sent a stunning spell back, but Bellatrix calmly deflected.

“Ah, what’s the matter, cousin, are you too afraid to hurt your ickle little cousin Bella?” asked Bellatrix in her mock baby voice. “Didn’t stop you that one time, when you turned me away.”

“Bella, I tried to get you help but you ran away before I could do what was necessary,” said Sirius, who began to realize that Azkaban had done a number on Bellatrix’s mind. She was not right in the head to begin with because of the rough childhood she had, but he mostly was able to keep her under control at Hogwarts. By her fifth year, Sirius could not handle trying to keep Bella in line and tried to insist that she get help, but she ran off. Still over the years she had gotten worse and her recollection of reality was shoddy at best.

“LIES!” shouted Bellatrix angrily, as she throw a blast of fire at Sirius, whose back was right towards the veil. The disembodied voices from the other side of the veil had begun to get annoying, as they tempted Sirius to jump though. He could almost hear Lily and James on the other side, beckoning him to come though to join him. “I thought you cared about me, but you shunned me for your little friends and the Mudblood, even though she’s nothing but a disruptive little bitch. She’s the reason why Pettigrew turned on you lot and deep down you know it.”

"Don't you dare tell lies like that about Lily!" snapped Sirius angrily as he dodged another attack before he fired one right towards Bellatrix.

"Why not, she's nothing but a cheap two timing Mudblood slut!" cackled Bellatrix as she dodged a dangerous spell from Sirius. "She dumped Snape when she leached all the knowledge she could off of him and she would have thrown Potter to the side as well, if the Dark Lord hadn't killed them both first. Not that Potter was much better, some of the things I heard he did to the younger Slytherin girls..."

"Crucio!" snapped Sirius, he was sick of Bellatrix saying these vile, slanderous lies about his deceased friends. Bellatrix screamed, but it was more of an orgasmic scream, then a scream of pain. Bellatrix dropped to the ground, panting as Sirius stepped forward, his back still against the veil. Sirius stood, numb, he had never used an Unforgiveable Curse on anyone before but Bellatrix had gotten under his skin enough.

"Like a proper Black for once, Sirius, perhaps you have balls after all," said Bellatrix as she rose to her feet. "Too bad I'm going to have to rip them off and shove them down your throat, cousin."

With that Bellatrix send even more dark spells, each getting more dangerous as she got more frustrated with Sirius's ability to block her every attack.

"This is the best the most trusted servant of Lord Voldemort can come up with!" taunted Sirius as he lazily blocked another spell, as he faced Bellatrix, back to the veil. "Surely you can do better than that?"

Bellatrix prepared to do better than that, as she saw that Sirius was opened to an attack with the mocking of her but before she could blast him though the veil, she could hear a spell being sent at her behind her back. She turned around and blocked it, before she was looked right into those same blasted emerald green eyes that caused her so much pain and ridicule. The person who owned the eyes might have been different.

"Sirius get out of here, I'll take it from here!" shouted Harry as he watched Sirius move safely away from the veil and Bellatrix sent a

spell in an attempt to burn out Harry's eyes, but Harry blocked it and sent on back. Bellatrix placed up a shield to block, before she nearly knocked Harry off of his feet.

"Aw, is Ickle Baby Potter getting tired?" asked Bellatrix as she sent magically created spike towards those damned eyes but Potter blocked it and angrily returned fire with a spell of his own. "Is Ickle Baby Potter getting cranky wanky? Does Ickle Baby Potter need a nappy wappy."

Harry did not let Bellatrix's annoying baby talk get into his head, as he sent a bright blast of light and a sonic vibration spell at his opponent who repelled the two sensory based assaults easily.

"Your little parlor tricks might have worked before, but not this time, Potter," said Bellatrix as Harry noticed she had a strange obsession of focusing her attacks to his eyes.

"I guess I'm going to have to try new parlor tricks then," said Harry as a dome of blinding light shot out of his wand. When the light cleared, a dozen magically created holographic duplicates of Harry Potter appeared in a circle around Bellatrix. Bellatrix angrily blasted one of the Potters with skin shredding curse but it just burst into nothingness.

"CRUCIO!" shrieked Bellatrix at the top of her lungs, she could not stand all of these green eyes staring at her, taunting her. One of the Potters was hit and it disappeared. Bellatrix turned around angrily as there appeared to be even more of the duplicates that she started with.

"A ninety year old Muggle with cataracts in both eyes can aim better than that," taunted the voice of Potter but Bellatrix looked wildly, as she sent two more spells but the illusions had vanished immediately. In fact, there appeared to be an infinite number of emerald green eyes staring at her. Bella clutched her hands to her head and screamed out loud.

"Ah, is ickle baby Bella getting all frustrated?" taunted the voice of Harry Potter in the same mock babyish tones that Bella had attempted.

“SHUT YOUR MOUTH, HALF BLOOD!” screamed Bellatrix as she threw more spells but it appeared that they were just more fakes.

“Ah you can dish it out, but you can’t take it,” responded Harry as he watched at a safe distance underneath the Invisibility Cloak, Bellatrix throw even more spells at the duplicates. What she did not realize, that until Harry cancelled the spell, for every illusion destroyed, three more would pop up to replace it. “What’s the matter, Bella? Too weak to stomach your own medicine?”

“I’ll show you weak, Potter, I’ll present you to the Dark Lord in pieces,” said Bellatrix, the word “weak” brought back all sorts of horrific memories deep within her fractured mind as she attacked the duplicates even more viciously then before.

“Was it something I said?” asked Harry, as he had no idea what set Bellatrix off to cause her to increase her attacks but he suspected she was simply getting frustrated. “Aw did I hurt wittle baby Bella’s ickle feelings?”

Bellatrix fired more attacks but there now appeared to be at least a hundred of these eyes staring at her. She could see them looking at her with some sort of smug triumphant look at her failures, at every horrific thing that happened. Those green eyes were causing Bellatrix to lose her mind.

She closed her eyes but she could still see them. They were staring at her, mocking her, taunting her. Bella felt as if she had drowned in an endless sea of emerald green.

Bellatrix opened her eyes back up and she moved towards the veil, to throw herself inside, so she would never have to see those emerald green eyes ever again.

Before she could get close enough, ropes wrapped around her legs. She fell on her face down onto the ground and her wand was kicked out of her grasp. She turned around. In reality, it was Harry Potter standing over her but in her demented, fractured, mind, she saw a thirteen year old Lily Evans standing over her with a smug smirk on

her face. Those emerald green eyes were the last thing she remembered for a while as the world went black around her.

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"Everyone's where they need to be, right?" asked Ginny as she was outside with Harry, the members of the D.A. and Sirius.

"Yep, all nice and gift wrapped for the Ministry, even Voldemort won't be able to break though the protections on the chamber I have them in, as far as anyone else knows, the Unspeakables were the ones that captured them, it's not like that lot will tell anyone one way or another," said Harry as he took a deep breath. "Thanks for help but right now, the next thing I have to do is something we have to do on my own."

"We know Harry and good luck," said Ginny as she embraced Harry, before giving him a brief, but passionate kiss, with the unspoken agreement that there was more to come once Harry's business was done, before the D.A. took the Portkeys back to Hogwarts, with Sirius disappearing back home.

Harry turned into the distance, as he walked forward into the main Hall of Prophecies. There was an eerie calm in the air which confirmed to Harry more than anything that he was right.

"Okay Riddle, I've sent my friends home, I've incapacitated your minions, now it's time to settle whether or not what happened in the graveyard was a fluke or not due to you being weak from the blood transfusion," said Harry in the empty Hall of Prophecies. "Now just you and me, Riddle, one on one, wizard against wizard. I know you can hear me, I know you're lurking somewhere."

"Perceptive as usual, Potter," said a soft voice and Voldemort walked from the shadows, to survey Harry though his slit like red eyes. "It appears that my Death Eaters have failed me once again, such a disappointment, it appears I will have the pleasure of personally dealing with you and obtaining the prophecy."

Voldemort and Harry stood each other, neither wizard blinking as they prepared to duel.

And that's the end of Chapter Twenty Five because Voldemort against Harry is really something that deserves its own chapter. Yes, another cliffhanger, but what are you going to do.

Next chapter Voldemort and Harry duel. Will Voldemort get the prophecy? If so, exactly how pissed will Voldemort be when he sees it's a fake? Will Harry utterly humiliate Voldemort again? Will Dumbledore find a way through the barrier? When will the Aurors find out that the disturbance was a diversion? Will Batman and Robin escape the Riddler's Rubix Cube of Utter Doom and Dismemberment?(er wait a minute, wrong fandom). Will Nott suffer a severe duck related trauma from his ordeal? Why am I asking you these questions? There is only one way to find out and that's to tune in this weekend(or sometime there about) for Chapter Twenty Six.

Chapter Twenty Six: Faceoff.

Harry stood face to face with Voldemort, as with the battle with the graveyard, both wizards were waiting for their opponent to make the first move. Wands were drawn, neither took their eyes off of each other.

“Potter, I will give you one chance to surrender and hand me the prophecy,” said Voldemort softly as he looked at Potter. “There is so much potential with you that can be properly nurtured under my watchful eye. There is no need for us to be on opposite sides, Harry, I see real power and you would be a valuable asset to my campaign.”

Harry stood, amused that Voldemort would think that Harry would ever join him.

“It didn’t work the first time Tom, it’s not going to work this time,” answered Harry coolly. “Let me make one thing perfectly clear, Tom, I don’t follow anyone, especially not some deluded megalomaniac who is the bastard child of a squib and a Muggle, who is trying to pass himself off as a pureblood wizard. I’m not a fool Voldemort, I know how you think, it’s you high above everyone else in power and no one can even come close enough to challenge your little status as the Dark Lord. You see Riddle, I can beat you. I’ve done it before and I can do it again.”

“We’ll see Potter,” responded Voldemort calmly, as he looked at his opponent with cold disinterest. “Since you didn’t hand over the prophecy, I believe it is time for us to duel, to prove that you managed to luck your way into the victory in the Graveyard. You will fall this time Potter, this time my blood is stabilized and there will be no distractions.”

“We’ll see, Riddle,” said Harry as Voldemort had obviously not accounted for the fact that Harry had an extra year of magical experience under his belt now and had learned several new tricks that Voldemort might not expect. “Now we bow, Riddle.”

Both wizards turned to each other, before they bowed to each other and the second that Harry lifted his head, he saw a coma curse

spiraling towards him. Harry dodged the attack, before he sent a metal spike right towards Voldemort's heart. The spike came an inch away from connecting with Voldemort, but it was blocked. Several flaming daggers spiraled right towards Voldemort but Voldemort deflected the attacks as his enemy kept moving. A nerve numbing curse failed to stop Harry, before a shelf was levitated right into the air and flung right towards Voldemort. Voldemort blasted the shelf and sent several glass orbs down to the floor. They shattered one by one, as several ghostly figures recited words that could not be heard properly, with the floor littered with broken pieces of glass. Voldemort stood to see his enemy.

"Crucio!" hissed Voldemort but Harry casually flicked his wrist, before a stone shield rose out of the ground, to catch the spell, before he sent a spiral of fire towards Voldemort. The fire shot towards Voldemort, spiraling like a corkscrew towards the Dark Lord. Expertly, Voldemort froze the fire and caused it freeze, before it dropped to the ground, sending pieces of ice flying in every direction.

"Come on Riddle, surely you could get one spell on me," said Harry as a couple of dark spells barely missed connecting with Harry. "Twenty six Death Eaters failed, really shows how good you are at picking talented witches and wizards to do your bidding, doesn't it? Yet, I thought you would give me a better fire. I mean, you are Lord Voldemort, the most feared dark wizard in a century, but you can't get one simple spell on me."

Voldemort refused to respond to Potter's taunts. He threw black snake like ropes towards his opponent, but they just barely connected with the shield as he saw his enemy had disappeared, before Potter was behind him. A skin shredding curse was thrown towards Voldemort. Voldemort effortlessly blocked the attack and a heart exploding curse was blocked once again before Voldemort whipped his wand towards Potter. The ground rumbled and Voldemort watched with glee as his opponent was knocked off balance. Voldemort walked over, robes billowing behind him, as he stood over Potter.

“Time to teach you some respect, Potter,” said Voldemort as while he did need the boy’s body for the ritual to transfer his consciousness into Potter, his sanity did not need to be intact. “Crucio.”

Harry bit his tongue, he could be put under this curse a million times and it still would not be pleasant. Seconds appeared to turn into minutes, as the curse attacked every nerve ending in his body. Voldemort stepped back and Harry took advantage of the lapse of concentration from Voldemort, by throwing a blast of fire into his fire. Voldemort stepped back, with an inhumane scream, as his face was severely burned. Harry stood to his feet and the bone shattering curse struck Voldemort right in the right arm. Several loud snaps echoed throughout the Hall of Prophecies as Harry levitated the broken pieces of glass from the orbs and flung them at him. Voldemort managed to shatter some of the pieces of glass into dust, but a few of them had spiked him right in the right shoulder and chest. Blood dripped to the ground but Voldemort threw a blast of orange light right between the eyes. Harry crouched down and a hole was blasted in the wall, before he dodged around.

“Potter, I’m losing my patience with you,” said Voldemort.

“That’s not the only thing you’re losing Riddle, you’re losing this duel as well,” answered Harry smugly as he felt more spells come close to him but he blocked what he knew he could block and he dodged them. “This is what, the fourth time you’ve failed to defeat me. I believe that would be a Troll level grade and I don’t mean what you look like either, Riddle.”

A bone breaking curse was blocked, it very nearly struck Harry in the leg which would have resisted his movement. He was pleased that Voldemort’s movements were awkward due to the fact that his wand arm was broken and he had to rely on his left arm. Any advantage that Harry could take, he would.

“I mean, most people would have given up by now, but you keep coming, so I’ve got to give your credit, Voldemort,” said Harry as he blocked a brain swelling curse aimed by Voldemort, before he aimed a head splitting hex right back at Voldemort. If his calculations were correct and they were rarely off, it would be only just a few more

minutes before Dumbledore managed to crack the code and get through the barrier that he placed off. Until then, Harry would continue to fight Voldemort. "You're persistent sure, it proves that you're a hard worker and refuse to give up what you want. If you were a bit more loyal, you might have fit in well in Hufflepuff."

A cloud of acid shot right towards Harry. Harry avoided the attack, as the acid ate through the ground. Another corrosive curse came closest to hit Harry, but it struck the shelf, eating through it, causing several more prophecy orbs to fly in every directions. They shattered from the impact, with more ghostly images in every direction. Harry narrowly blocked a curse that was unfamiliar to him and circled around Voldemort, which prompted another brain swelling curse to be thrown towards him.

"Very nearly hit me with that one Riddle, come on, you can do it," said Harry, as if he was encouraging a young child to ride his first bicycle. Voldemort threw another spell that completely scorched the ground that Harry stood on. The entire Hall of Prophecies reeked of dark magic, from the misses spells. "Okay, maybe you actually can't, but I decided to give you the benefit of the doubt. Exactly how many shots did you have at me so far?"

More attempts to shut Potter up were just avoided as the boy had succeeded in raising his ire even more. He still needed Potter and the prophecy was still on his person. Voldemort tried to take Potter down and silence him without damaging either of the two things he needed but Potter had continued to taunt him.

"Of course, your plan really wasn't exactly all that smart either, Riddle," said Harry as he moved around, ducking behind a shelf, before he banished the shelf towards Voldemort. The shelf was blasted into pieces as he saw Voldemort's eyes blaze with fury. "It was quite lucky I decided to humor you in the first place, wasn't it? I mean you tried to lure me here with a vision that Sirius was in trouble. Even if I received it, what makes you think I would have not done everything in my power to check if it was genuine or not."

Voldemort refused to dignify Potter with an answer as he another brain swelling curse at his enemy, but it was blocked. It appeared

right now that Potter never received the vision that he had sent him, but yet Severus assured him that the connection that he shared with Potter would be easy to breach. The boy would not have been able to determine whether anything he saw was real and fake.

“Of course, another brilliant plan of yours was that plan last year, I was willing to let that one slide, but exactly how stupid your idea to use the Triwizard Tournament as a death trap?” taunted Harry, as he knew he was just barely able to hold off these attacks right now, despite how sloppy the attacks were but he took great pleasure in getting inside Voldemort’s head. “If you were as cunning as everyone thought you were, you could have had your little minion stun me, take some of my blood, modify my memory, and take the blood from you. No one would be the wiser, not me, not Dumbledore, surely not the Ministry of Magic. But I can’t expect anything less from a wizard who once it’s all said and done will be best known for being the dark lord who was defeated by a one year old child.”

Harry was blasted backwards but he managed to rebound quickly and aimed another attack at Voldemort, but Voldemort stopped the attack. Two spells were sent at each other simultaneously by the two wizards as they bounced off of each other, before a loud explosion reverberated throughout the Department of Mysteries.

“I was wrong about one thing though Riddle, you do know more than three spells, so kudos to that,” said Harry as he blocked a lung shredding hex. “Come on Tom, hit me with your best shot, not that it’s that good. Surely the great and powerful Lord Voldemort can beat a fifteen year old wizard who has not even taken his Ordinary Wizarding Level exams. It’d be so sad if it wasn’t so funny.”

“Do you ever shut up?” hissed Voldemort angrily as a bright yellow light was aimed towards Harry’s throat, but Harry blocked the attack, preventing his throat from being sealed shut.

“No sorry, I just have to point out the stupidity of my enemy’s overly convoluted plans,” responded Harry, as he blocked another attack. Voldemort turned to face Harry and Harry found himself blasted into a shelf of prophecies. It was lucky he managed to put on a cushioning

spell that absorbed the brunt of the attack. Harry was still leaned against the shelf as Voldemort advanced him.

“Crucio,” said Voldemort as he punished Harry. Harry refused to give Voldemort the satisfaction of hearing him scream even though this Cruciatus Curse was a particularly vicious one. Harry’s eyes were barely open, as Voldemort continued to punish Harry with the spell. Harry tried to fight the pain, after spending nearly a minute under the curse. Before Harry could fight back, Voldemort raised the wand. “Imperio.”

Harry just felt a very vague light headed feeling as the curse, with all the power that Voldemort had just put over him, had just barely managed to take hold.

“Hand over the prophecy Potter,” ordered Voldemort in his own soft deadly way, as he looked at his young enemy.

“Get bent,” responded Harry simply as Voldemort had raised his wand.

“Perhaps another dose of pain to teach you obedience,” said Voldemort calmly as he raised his wand, but a blast of fire from Harry’s wand struck him in the eyes. Voldemort was backed off as Potter was back on his feet. He watched his young enemy through slightly blurry vision, it was only down to the magical properties of his new body that his retinas were completely not burnt out. He saw Potter make his way to the door so he whipped his wand and several snakes rose out of the ground. They faced Harry, hissing loudly as Voldemort turned to them, the burn marks looking more prominent ever on his pale face. “Attack Potter.”

The snakes shot towards Potter, but much to his surprise, the boy did not seem scared.”

“Stop,” hissed the boy in Parseltongue and Voldemort looked surprised. He was not informed that the boy could speak Parseltongue as well. His followers had neglected to mention such a thing to him “I am your true master, destroy Lord Voldemort!”

The snakes rose up into the air and sprang towards Voldemort fangs bared but Voldemort would not be defeated this easily.

“Stop you foolish serpents, do not listen to that brat, I’m your master, I’m the Dark Lord, I’m your creator, subdue the boy,” hissed Voldemort angrily and the snakes paused, before they turned towards Potter and sprang towards Potter.

“Halt,” responded Harry and the magically created snakes obeyed, as they stared at Harry, as if waiting instructions. “Listen to no other words except for the following. Bite Voldemort, sink your fangs into him, and subdue him.”

The snakes turned towards Voldemort and they sprung towards him.

“Halt, I am your master, obey me,” hissed Voldemort as he watched his own creations turn on him but the snakes ignored his words, as Potter looked at him with a triumphant look on his face. Two of the snakes were ripped apart but the third snake had sunk its fangs right into the forearm of Voldemort. It was only in a few seconds but long enough to cause Voldemort severe discomfort. A yellow light ripped into the state. It was decapitated; the head still in Voldemort’s arm, with the fangs still sunk into his forearm, before Voldemort slowly pulled the head up, removing the fangs painfully from his arm, just barely able to stop wincing. Two moderate size gashes appeared on his forearm, as the fangs dripped with Voldemort’s blood. Voldemort hastily repaired the damage, but it would only be temporary, a potion would need to be taken later to completely stabilize himself. The moment he recovered, a blast of fire was aimed towards his face. This time, Voldemort had a counter ready as he froze the fire and it dropped to the ground, to shatter into pieces of pieces.

Harry continued to avoid the attacks, but Voldemort had gotten a bit more daring and threw several more attacks. It would be too much to hope for that Voldemort would drop with a case of magical fatigue, so until Dumbledore showed up, he would need to keep the pace. One spell was deflected but Harry gave a surprised scream in pain when he realized a conjured metal spike struck him right in the leg, impaling him right through the skin and shattering his bone. He dropped to the ground, had he been a Muggle, he would have been in a much worst

situation, but still, having a spike rammed getting rammed in one's leg. Voldemort had managed to master using his left arm well enough and Harry tried to get up, but his leg failed him. He still had one last trump card that would allow him to at least remove the spike the leg and make a partial recovery.

"Tom, think fast!" shouted Harry as he threw the prophecy, for real this time. Voldemort's eyes widened, as he quickly conjured a pillow on the ground, exactly where the prophecy landed seconds later. Voldemort walked over, as Harry managed to remove the spike, with a bit of difficulty from his leg. He mentally tried to shut out the pain as he saw his opponent take the bait, as he placed the glass orb inside the pocket of his robes.

"At last it's finally mine," said Voldemort in a gleeful tone of voice as he turned to Harry, who had pulled himself to his feet, despite having a mangled right leg. Voldemort turned the wounded wizard, as he treaded lightly. Potter would become desperate with his injuries and there was no telling what he might do. "Now Potter, it's time that I silence that impudent tongue of yours once and for all."

"Silence this, Riddle," said Harry as he managed to pull himself up with the assistance of the wall, before a simulated round of sonic vibrations assaulted Voldemort's ears, but only for a few seconds. An alarm that was sounded made Harry realized that Dumbledore had managed to take down the barrier and thus he would be coming shortly. The loud sound based assaults were repelled back towards Harry, but he managed to muffle his ears to block out the attacks. Harry slumped against the walls as the attacks faded. He heard footsteps, Dumbledore was on his way, so he dropped down, against the wall, as if he had suffered a severe beating at the hands of Voldemort that he could not recover from.

"To your feet Potter, so I can defeat you properly," challenged Voldemort as he let his threat out in a dangerous hiss. Harry just saw the shadow of Dumbledore approaching in the distance, before he stopped.

"I believe you will not be winning today, Tom," said Dumbledore as he appeared right in front of Voldemort, calm, cool and collected but a bit

tired. That barrier had taken much longer to disable than he had thought and afterwards, he had sounded the alarm, hopefully by now, the Aurors would realize the disturbance that they went to investigate early was a fake.

“Dumbledore,” hissed Voldemort angrily as he turned, completely ignoring Harry, as he faced off against the one man that he was said to fear. “You made a grave mistake in coming here today, I will finish you off once and for all. You have ruined my plans for the last time.”

“I’m afraid that you were the one who made the grave mistake Tom, as the Aurors have been called and it will be moments before they find their way down,” said Dumbledore as Voldemort threw a skin shredding curse right towards him but Dumbledore effortlessly cancelled the spell with a mere motion.

“They will be greeted by your corpse, Dumbledore,” responded Voldemort as another deadly curse was aimed right towards his adversary’s heart but Dumbledore blocked it. Despite his personal feelings on the two men, these were the two most famous wizards in the world, so Harry was a bit intrigued in watching the battle. A third attack by Voldemort had been repelled back at him and thus there was a need to put up a shield to completely block the attack. Both wizards circled each other, before they threw attacks simultaneously at each other. They met in mid air and thus cancelled each other. “Tonight, you will die Dumbledore and the world will know that Lord Voldemort did it.”

“If I have to take that journey, then I am not afraid to do so, unlike you Tom,” said Dumbledore in a confident voice, as he blocked another attack. “There are things that you must realize will be even worse than death, the afterlife is something that is not to be feared, but rather a brand new adventure that should be cherished.”

“Foolish rhetoric spouted by a foolish man,” said Voldemort coldly as Dumbledore moved around and Harry’s eyes widened slightly when he got a good look at Dumbledore’s wand. He had never really saw it this close before but truly, the marks on the side, even though they were faint, could still easily be seen.

Albus Dumbledore was the man to possess the third Hallow, the Elder Wand. Voldemort's latest magical attack was deflected by Dumbledore and Harry waited with baited breath. A blast caught Dumbledore right in the hip and he was staggered.

"AVADA KEDAVRA!" yelled Voldemort suddenly and Harry watched as the green light flew right towards Dumbledore. For a second, Harry was shocked that Dumbledore made no move to avoid the attack but suddenly, Fawkes appeared right in front of Dumbledore in a flash of flame, before he swallowed the Killing Curse. The phoenix burst into flames immediately and the ashes fluttered to the ground. Voldemort rebounded quickly, but Dumbledore showed amazing agility for a man his age. He spun his arm around, as he held the wand straight without it moving. Several bright sphere light objects shot from Dumbledore's wand and struck Voldemort directly in the chest. The dangerous dark wizard stepped back, screaming in absolutely agony.

Harry recognized the attack as a light spell that help calm down distressed children, but Dumbledore had managed to find a way to amplify the power, to bombard Voldemort with an attack that was nearly as painful as the Cruciatus Curse. Voldemort broken out and an organ explosion curse was sent directly towards Dumbledore who blocked it, but this attack had taken a fair bit out of him.

"I believe our encounter tonight is over, Tom," said Dumbledore quietly as he stood there but Voldemort saw Harry, before a smirk appeared on Voldemort's face that the Boy-Who-Lived did not like one bit.

"On the contrary Dumbledore, it has just begun," said Voldemort as he appeared to transform into a cloud of black smoke.

"Harry stay there!" shouted Dumbledore anxiously and Harry, even if he could because of his injured leg, had no intention of moving whatsoever. If Voldemort decided to possess him, there would be a few nasty surprises waiting in Harry's mind. Harry snuck a look up, with a mask of what he intended to be confusion before he felt what could only be described as sinister tentacles seep into his mind.

Voldemort could sense that he was inside the boy's mind but something was not right. He should have had a stronger hold than he did but it was slightly weaker from the hold he had on Quirrell when he possessed the young wizard years back.

"Hello, Tom, welcome to my mind, I hope you don't mind how unraveled it is, I didn't have a chance to tidy up before you decided to drop in," echoed the voice of Harry Potter. "In case you haven't figured it out, you aren't in the real world any more, you're in my mind and in here, I make the rules."

"It matters little, I will use you to see whether or not the old fool will sacrifice you as a pawn," said Voldemort calmly as he attempted to latch onto Harry's mind but something burned him, it prevented him from grabbing a tight hold.

"I don't think you've gotten it yet Riddle, perhaps if you put that brain of yours to use, you might figure out exactly why this hostile takeover of my mind is not working out as it planned," said Harry. "After all, you're not stupid, just insane."

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Dumbledore paused as he watched Harry stand there, rather rigid and the next move he made, he had to calculate this perfectly.

"It's the perfect chance Dumbledore," said Harry's voice, but Dumbledore knew it was Voldemort's words coming out of Harry's mouth. "The boy is weak, underpowered, if you kill him now, you'll destroy me. Just do it Dumbledore, it's not like he's the first person you've sacrificed to achieve a goal. It will undo all of the failures of your life. You allowed me to rise to power Dumbledore, the blood of everyone I had to kill is on your hands, but you can erase all those mistakes right now. Just two words, you know what they are. Kill the boy Dumbledore, it's not like you care about his future anyway."

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“Bravo Potter, I couldn’t have said it any better myself,” said Voldemort as the two stood in Harry’s mind.

“Yes but the difference between you and me is that you’d be arrogant enough to believe that Dumbledore would actually be stupid enough think that killing me would get rid of you, when you have seconds to vacate my body before it completely shuts down,” said Harry smugly. “Figured it out yet, by the way Riddle?”

“The connection, Snape lied to me,” hissed Voldemort as he looked at Potter.

“Bravo Tom, ten points to Slytherin,” responded Harry but one thing was for certain. It would sure suck to be Severus Snape when Voldemort got a hold of him.

“Connection or not, I will take control of your mind all the same,” said Voldemort confidentially but Harry responded by laughing.

“You still think that you can win, when you’re inside my mind,” answered Harry as he moved over, as a mental representation of a door. “In fact, open that door and you can meet your deepest darkest fear. If I’m wrong I’ll willingly give up control of my body.”

“I fear nothing Potter,” said Voldemort coldly.

“Then what are you waiting for, Tom?” asked Harry. “Open the door.”

Voldemort took a few steps towards the door, not wanting to trigger any mental traps that Potter might have set up.

Harry sat and watched the show.

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“If you don’t take the proper action now Dumbledore, you’re be looked upon as the wizard who let everyone down when he had a chance to the right thing,” hissed Harry’s voice, as Dumbledore looked worried, he sounded more and more like Voldemort by the

second. "If death is so painless, just use it, it's just one spell, easy for someone like you."

"Harry! Listen to me!" shouted Dumbledore urgently. "You have to fight him. Think about the ones that you love and love you!"

Harry or rather Voldemort responded with a cold high laugh. Dumbledore raised his wand, assessing his options. A mere stunning spell might not subdue Voldemort and a killing curse was out of the question given his plans for Harry.

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Voldemort opened up the door and he stepped back to see himself, laying on the ground, cold, dead, lifeless, and utterly defeated. He took a half of a step back, disgusted out how weak and pathetic he looked.

"A glimpse into the not so distance future, Tom," said Harry coolly as he hear footsteps from the distance. "There's nothing I hate more than a house guest that overstays his welcome and for the record Riddle, I let you in here to keep you busy until the Aurors arrived. Now it's time for your eviction notice."

Voldemort felt his hold on Potter's mind get broken as he was ejected back into darkness.

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Harry dropped to the ground as he saw Dumbledore look relieved as Voldemort appeared in the flesh just as the Aurors, lead by Scrimgeour, with Fudge and Madam Bones in the distance.

"It's You-Know-Who!" shouted one of the Aurors in a shocked voice and Voldemort spun around, as he saw the Aurors along with a few high ranking officials.

"Today is not the glorious victory you've counted on Dumbledore, because I have the prophecy!" shouted Voldemort triumphantly before he disappeared with a pop as several stunning spells blasted

towards him, not that they would have done much good had he remained around.

“Cornelius, I believe that you know that I have been correct all of this time,” answered Dumbledore calmly and Fudge turned around, his eyes widened when he realized that Dumbledore had found a way into the Ministry as well and he looked sickened when he saw that Harry appeared to be seriously injured. It would be very bad publicity if the Boy-Who-Lived was injured on Ministry of Magic property, it would mean the end of his career. Fudge had to work on both covering this up and explaining the You-Know-Who thing. Rita Skeeter would be drooling if she found out the predicament Fudge was in right now.

“Aurors, get Mr. Potter out of here and to St. Mungos,” said Fudge as he nodded to a group of Aurors, who helped Harry up before Fudge turned to Dumbledore. “Dumbledore, I should arrest you.”

“You may have a point Cornelius, but it would cause your career to be ruined when the world learns that I have been telling the truth the entire time,” responded Dumbledore with a twinkle in his eye as he looked at the Minister of Magic. “As you’ve seen with your very own eyes, Voldemort has returned.”

“Yes, yes, I know, Dumbledore,” said Fudge tensely as he stepped forward and the door off to the side swung open, to reveal several bodies bound and secured in Death Eater robes. “Merlin’s beard! Exactly how many of them are there?”

“Looks to be about twenty or twenty five, maybe more,” said Scrimgeour off hand as he saw the Death Eaters. “I’m going to have to get more Aurors down here, to get this lot to the holding facilities until we can get them off to Azkaban.”

“Interesting,” said Dumbledore but he was completely confused as to how exactly that many Death Eaters were secured. It appeared that Harry had come down here alone as Dumbledore walked off.

“Hold it right there, Albus, you can’t just walk out of here, you’re a fugitive still,” said Fudge as the remaining Aurors pointed their wands

towards Dumbledore. "You still have to account for the murder of Arthur Weasley. Perhaps you did not directly kill the man, but we did uncover evidence that it was under your suggestion that he was down here on the night in question."

"That I do not deny, Cornelius, but I fear that we must overlook that, if we are to band together to defeat a true enemy," said Dumbledore.

"Yes, Minister, I'm afraid he's right," said Madam Bones. "I suggest that all of the charges are dropped but under one condition."

"What condition is that, Madam Bones?" inquired Dumbledore curiously.

"That Dumbledore completely disbands the vigilante group called the Order of the Phoenix and agrees to never reform that group or any other similar group for the remainder of his days," said Bones.

"I want it to be a magically binding agreement too, Dumbledore," said Fudge.

"Is my word not good enough, Cornelius?" asked Dumbledore.

"No," responded Fudge shortly.

"You better sign it Albus, or I'll have no choice but you have you arrested," added Scrimgeour in a regretful voice as Dumbledore sighed.

"Very well, you hold all of the cards," said Dumbledore.

"We will arrange a meeting, but this does not mean you get your old positions of power back, you must start back at the bottom," responded Fudge who looked to be enjoying himself.

"If it's what gets us working together," said Dumbledore who thought that this would give him more time to get Harry ready for where he needed to be more it was time for the next great adventure.

“Very well, Scrimgeour, get these Death Eaters to a secure area, so we can identify them,” ordered Fudge who felt he needed some firewhiskey and a nice long lie down right about now. He could just imagine the press fiasco tomorrow. That was not going to be pleasant.

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Harry laid in a room of St. Mungos. It was nice enough he supposed and he would get released in the morning. He had contacted Ginny, to tell her he was okay and the Healers said he would make a full recovery despite having a magically conjured steel spike impaled into his leg.

By now, the Death Eaters would be in the process of being moved to Azkaban and Harry bet his entire vault that they would be out of Azkaban by the time he completed his O.. Still, while he could have easily had each and every one of those Death Eaters killed if he wanted to, it would have proven nothing. By doing it Dumbledore’s way and throwing them into Azkaban, it would prove that he was right about taking a heavy more heavy handed approach to dealing with the Death Eaters.

Still, he laid back. Since Ginny was not here, it would mean a restless night of sleep, but Harry had to try to rest so he would be let out first thing in the morning.

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Dumbledore sank down into a chair in the backroom of the Hog’s Head. He would discretely send word to Minerva to tell Harry to meet him down here once he was discharged from St. Mungos. It was time for him to know the prophecy, especially when by now, Voldemort would have found out what it contained.

It appeared that all of the Death Eaters that Severus indicated would take part of the mission, with the exception of Bellatrix Lestrange, had been captured and sent to Azkaban. Whether it would stick, Dumbledore hoped so. The mystery behind who captured that was a mind teaser for certain but Dumbledore would have to gain a closer look inside Harry’s mind once he had told him about the Prophecy.

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Voldemort sank down, just in the process of taking the potions to stabilize the injuries and eliminate the venom in his blood. His body would do the rest in hours. He was never more disgusted with his followers ever than he was today. Each and every one of them, including Bella, had gotten themselves captured by Aurors and now had been placed in Azkaban. If he had not needed the sheer numbers to induce fear, the Dark Lord would let them rot. As it was now, in a few weeks, he would break them back out and punish them all severely.

One great victory came out of today's efforts and that was the glass orb that contained the prophecy. He had obsessed about it for months and now it was his to hold. Voldemort savored the moment as he placed the glass orb. Soon he would hear every word and perhaps find a hint on how to deal with Potter. He gently opened the prophecy but instead of Trelawney, the ghostly form of Harry Potter appeared, staring at Voldemort with pure mirth in his eyes before he spoke.

Roses are red, violets are blue.

This prophecy is a fake, just like you.

Words had not been invented to describe the utter fury that Voldemort was feeling right now.

Alright, done a day early. That's just awesome, because it means I don't have to write anything until Monday(even though I might get some work done anyway over the weekend)! Next chapter or two will tie up some loose ends as the fifth year comes to a close, including Hermione makes her move and an event that I have personally titled "Dolores Umbridge's Last Stand". Then we head towards a very interesting and slightly odd summer holiday.

See you all again after a little while.

Chapter Twenty Seven: Breakdown

Harry removed his Invisibility Cloak as he entered the Hog's Head. McGonagall had met him once he had returned from St. Mungos and passed him a note that Dumbledore wanted to meet with him immediately. While Dumbledore had no power over Harry, he decided to just humor the former Headmaster by attending the meeting. If he knew nothing else, it was just best for Dumbledore to think he was getting his way. Harry entered the pub as he saw a slightly grumpy old man, who he knew to be Dumbledore's odd brother Aberforth.

"This way," said Aberforth gruffly, as the pub was empty, other than a couple of people who have had a few too many drinks. Harry nodded, as he made his way into the back room of the pub where Dumbledore sat, with a smile and a twinkle in his eye as Harry sat down right across him.

"Hello Harry, thank you for coming on such short notice, I shall not monopolize too much of your time but there are things you need to know right now, even if you are still recovering from your ordeal at the hands of Voldemort," said Dumbledore with a good natured smile, as Harry just sat down, trying to allow his face to remain neutral. "How are you feeling after that encounter?"

"Better than I was, Voldemort is not a walk in the park, I'll tell you that much," responded Harry, but despite everything he suffered, he had gotten a few good shots in on Voldemort as well, so he was able to call the battle an overall success.

"No, I thought it would not be, I do apologize that you had to deal with Voldemort for as long as you did, I intended to join you two sooner, but it appears that Tom was a bit more cunning than I expected and put up a barrier to prevent external interference, it took some time to disable it," responded Dumbledore as he probed around in Harry's mind, but he could not get a sense of what precisely was happening in the battle. All he could see were several of the Death Eaters being knocked out of play as Harry just barely avoided getting put down. He showed some promise granted and he managed to find a few ways to use the Death Eater's attacks against him but he was rather outmatched. In other words, the battle went exactly how Dumbledore

wanted it to go. His power was evolving at a nature rate, as opposed to accomplishing too much with his magic too soon. Dumbledore recalled that he had suffered a similar phenomenon and it had cost him very dearly. Tom was lost to the darkness being too powerful too soon. "I'm truthfully sorry Harry, if I had arrived sooner or had been a bit quicker, you would have not had to suffer with Voldemort attempting to possess you."

"I understand you had your hands full, Headmaster," said Harry, but he knew that Dumbledore was not sorry at all. In fact, he was curious about the full extent of the connection and whether Harry could keep Voldemort out.

"Thanks Harry, but perhaps I should remind you that I'm no longer the Hogwarts Headmaster or have any positions of power thanks to the mistakes I've made," responded Dumbledore, even though it touched him that Harry still thought of him as the rightful Headmaster of Hogwarts. "Do call me Albus, it might seem to be a little awkward at first, but considering as of right now, you technically are at a higher status than I am with the Junior Inquisitor role and status on the Wizengamot, even I had to give up my seat on there. All the concessions I had to make, understandable, but rather troubling. Still all in the name of regaining the trust of the Wizarding World after that unfortunate tragedy with Arthur Weasley."

"You did what you felt you needed to do, Albus," responded Harry who did feel a sort of pleasure in Dumbledore admitting that in a roundabout way that Harry was his superior. It was not like the Dumbledore seat would be returning back to him after a time, Harry had already pulled some strings and the seat was now under his control. He seriously considered giving it to Ginny as a birthday present this year. "Now, I've guessed by now that you haven't exactly called me here for a social visit."

"No Harry, I'm afraid this is on a manner of grave concern," responded Dumbledore as he grew rather serious. "I understand you might have some confusion about what Voldemort was after in the Department of Mysteries and exactly what its importance is. Exactly why I had Severus attempt to teach you Occlumency as well."

"It didn't work though, Albus," responded Harry and Dumbledore nodded his head.

"No, it appears that your mind is not properly adjusted for Occlumency due to a number of factors, none of them are your fault, it's just, the way it is," said Dumbledore which caused Harry to barely avoid smirking in triumph. He had really tricked Snape into thinking that his mind was hopeless in mastering Occlumency, when it did not take all that much time once he had shed his Voldemort related burden.

"I did do my best, though," argued Harry and Dumbledore nodded.

"I know and I commend you for giving it a try, even if it did appear to be frustrating," responded Dumbledore, who knew that despite Snape's less than complimentary reviews against Harry was based on his own grudges against the boy and Harry did make an honest attempt to learn the branch of magic, despite his struggles. "Now, I believe we got off the subject, as we have yet to talk about exactly what Voldemort was after in the Department of Mysteries."

"Malfoy said it was a prophecy of some sort, but I don't get it," responded Harry, even though he knew exactly what the prophecy was but Dumbledore did not need to know any more than he needed to know.

"Well Harry, let's take a trip down memory lane to many years ago, you were young, in your first year at Hogwarts," responded Dumbledore. "After you met Voldemort face to face for the first time since that night, you were sent to the Hospital wing and why you were there, you asked me a question. Do you remember what that question was?"

"I asked you why Voldemort wanted to kill me in the first place," answered Harry and Dumbledore nodded. "This prophecy has to do with the answer to that question, right?"

"Absolutely Harry, it has everything to do with the answer to that question, to make a long story short, a servant of Voldemort overheard the prophecy being given, when I had interviewed

Professor Trelawney for the position of the Divination teacher,” said Dumbledore as he sighed. “I wish that I had went with my first instincts and just did away with the position, none of this would have happened but the past unfortunately cannot be changed. Throughout the entire interview, I found myself to be rather disinterested by the potential candidate, that is until she went into a trance and began to recite a prophecy, detailing the one that would have the potential to defeat Lord Voldemort.”

“If someone overheard the prophecy, then why did Voldemort want it so badly?” asked Harry, who once again knew the answer. Snape had only overheard a fraction of the prophecy before he was interrupted in his efforts of eavesdropping by Aberforth Dumbledore.

“It was quite a stroke of luck that the intruder was detected and thus lacked the ability to hear the entire prophecy,” responded Dumbledore calmly as he surveyed Harry though twinkling eyes. “However, as you will soon learn, the part of the prophecy that Voldemort’s follower did relay back to him caused its share of damage and now that he has the actual prophecy in his grasp, there is much more damage that will be done.”

Harry sat right across from Dumbledore. Obviously Voldemort would know by now that what he had was not the actual prophecy, but he would not admit that fact to anyone in a million years. It would basically be Voldemort admitting failure and thus weakness and Harry knew exactly how Voldemort thought. His ego was as vast as his magical ability.

“I should have told you this prophecy years ago Harry, but forgive me, I wanted to give you a childhood and a chance to grow up without any of the burdens,” said Dumbledore and here it took every bit of self control Harry had not to bring up the Dursleys and the fact that being forced to live with that lot for even one second was the furthest thing from having a childhood free of any burdens. Even though he was over it for the most part and put them behind him, it still reminded him of a time that he was weaker and less cunning, a disturbing chapter in his life that he wanted to eliminate any trace of. “Now, Harry, I believe we have dodged around the issue for long enough, it’s time to here the reason why it’s sadly your destiny to fight Voldemort. If there

could be any other way, I would be happy to present the alternative but sadly, fate has different ideas of how it wishes to govern your life.”

Once again, if Dumbledore had just dealt with Voldemort before he became a problem, part of the problem would be fixed. Of course Voldemort was just a byproduct of the diseases that poisoned the Wizarding World, as was Dumbledore but even Harry had to admit that they had grown into something just as disruptive as the overall plague that crippled everything. They would both have to be dealt with, first Dumbledore, because as long as the former Headmaster lived, Harry would still be handcuffed to a certain extent. Even with his power neutered, Harry would be foolish not to assume that Dumbledore would try to force his presence where it is not wanted or needed. It was just an unfortunate personality trait that Dumbledore had that was quite annoying.

As he saw Dumbledore remove his pensieve from underneath the table, he got a good look at the Elder Wand. The plan to get the Elder Wand would coincide with Dumbledore’s ultimate defeat and was not something that really be done in one wand movement. It would be a carefully orchestrated plan, to eliminate Dumbledore without raising any suspicions and any hint that he was involved in anything. The fake ring currently in the Gaunt shack would be part one of the plan, to get the ball rolling.

Right now, Harry prepared to feign interest in Dumbledore revealing the prophecy to him. It was a bit tiring to get force fed information that he learned over a year ago but Harry had to play the game. He could not let Dumbledore have any hint that Harry was maneuvering against him in any way.

That was until it was too late for Dumbledore.

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“He’s back then, that’s the official word, Cornelius,” said Umbridge in a tired voice from her office at Hogwarts as she saw Fudge’s face. It looked like he had aged about fifty years in the past couple of days. “Truthfully back.”

“Yes, Dolores, He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named is back, I hoped I never had to deal with something to this magnitude in my career and now my entire career may be ruined, Skeeter’s already going to town, taking us to task for not investigating the entire incident involving the third task of the Triwizard more thoroughly,” answered Fudge as he put his head to his forehead. “Dumbledore did say, but I assumed that Harry would have said anything had he really returned. I don’t understand it, perhaps he had refused to accept that You-Know-Who had returned, even when he witnessed the return with his own eyes. Maybe he shut it out or something, I don’t know...”

“Potter is more cunning than you give him credit for, Cornelius,” said Umbridge, even though it pained her to admit it. “It is quite possible that the boy had used you to gain power in the Ministry and directly withheld evidence for his own benefit.”

“Now, Dolores, I think you’re overreacting,” responded Fudge with an amused look on his face. “I doubt a mere boy could ever outsmart me and he would have no reason to consciously withhold information about You-Know-Who returning to power. I would think if anything, he would want to inform anyone and everyone of what he saw for obvious reasons. I think it is mostly a case of him just not wanting to believe what he saw.”

“Are you certain the campaign donations aren’t blinding you to the boy, Cornelius?” asked Umbridge and Fudge just looked at her.

“Dolores, I have overlooked some of your more extreme activities within the Ministry of Magic, just remember, you can be replaced and barely anyone would blame me if I do so,” said Fudge sternly. “With that in mind, I’m just barely hanging onto my position as Minister of Magic and also, anyone who worked closely with me will fall just as hard if I’m forced out. So tread lightly Dolores, keep a low profile until this entire thing dies down, if it dies down. One more big event and I’m heading for a forced retirement and any high ranking officials fall with me. Is that clear?”

“It is Minister,” said Umbridge, who knew she needed to be a bit more careful in her efforts to expose the Potter boy for what he was. Granger had only come up with vague information so far that did her

no good. She had until the end of the year to come up with some concrete information, otherwise Granger would be exposed for her use of dark magic.

"Perfect Dolores, I have work to do, I will talk with you once more once it's feasible," said Fudge as he disappeared from the fire. Umbridge sat there, she wondered if Fudge was exaggerating when he said that anyone who worked closely with him would be taken down by association. She would find out more but in the meantime, she needed to plan every move carefully. Potter needed to be dealt with before he became even more of a problem than he was now.

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In the Room of Requirement, Harry entered the room where Ginny, Luna, Neville, Daphne, and Susan were all waiting. It was an hour before the D.A. meeting, but Harry had news for them. After he enjoyed the greeting Ginny gave him, as he whispered they would enjoy some quality time after the meeting, he sat down.

"Well Dumbledore, after I cleaned up his mess with all of the Death Eaters, decided now as the time to tell me the prophecy, that I knew for a year and a half, along with his opening closed minded theory about what the power the Dark Lord knows not is," said Harry. "Apparently, the power the Dark Lord knows not is the power of love."

The entire group burst out into laughing at this proclamation by Harry. Daphne seemed particularly amused by this and Luna was also snickering.

"Love, maybe if you kiss Voldemort, he'll turn into a prince or something," responded Luna and the group laughed even harder before Harry grew serious.

"Not for all the firewhiskey in the world," said Harry as he gagged at the power.

"Love, yeah, it's something that motivates, but a power?" asked Ginny as she shook her head. "Parseltongue is a power. Being a master of charms is a power. Love is an emotion."

“Actually, I do have my own interesting theory about what the power is,” said Harry as the entire group listened intently. “Dumbledore did come awfully close to nailing the power, while missing the point. I’ve looked at Voldemort, and one thing that sticks out in my mind is that it’s Voldemort and everyone else is below him. He would never share power if his life depends on it. There are no equals, no matter how much his followers want to delude themselves to the contrary.”

“So you think that the power that Voldemort knows not, is the ability to think of others as your equal and trust them, rather than below you and not trust them at all?” asked Neville.

“Well it does make more sense than Dumbledore’s little power of love explanation,” said Daphne.

“It does,” agreed Susan. “It makes perfect sense and it shows why Harry is different from Voldemort.”

“More sense than Dumbledore’s theory,” concluded Ginny.

“Also, I know where the Elder Wand is, by the way,” said Harry, almost out of the blue, and the five members of the D.A. leading council looked at Harry in surprise.

“You do?” asked Ginny in surprise, of all the things that she expected, this was among the least likely. Not that she lacked confidence in Harry’s ability to get the Elder Wand, but the trail to the wand was rather cold, the most they had been able to trace it back was a couple hundred years “Where did you find this out?”

“In the Department of Mysteries, when Dumbledore managed to break through the barrier, he began to duel with Voldemort and I saw the markings, as clear as day,” said Harry. “Albus Dumbledore has the third Hallow.”

“That figures, one of the most powerful wizards has a vital magical object,” said Daphne.

"I bet you have a plan to get the Elder Wand from Dumbledore," said Luna as if this was the most obvious and elementary thing in the world.

"Yes, I do, it will take some time, especially with Dumbledore not being in the public eye all that often, but I think it will work," answered Harry, who managed to get an idea what Dumbledore was up to when Dumbledore watched those fake visions. The prophecy was just the tip of the iceberg, Dumbledore had planned to have Harry view useless memories of Voldemort's histories, rather than teach him anything of value that might help in actually defeat Voldemort. Harry actually was amused that Dumbledore believed his own closed minded theories, that Harry can use the power of love as a crutch. "Once it's time, Dumbledore will be taken care of. Now, since this is our first D.A. meeting after the first practical application of what we learned, so anything you noticed that we need to work on or modify, I'm all ears."

With that, the group exchanged observations on what they witnessed and experienced against the Death Eaters in the Department of Mysteries. It gave Harry a lot of great information to make a few modifications to his lesson plans for the remainder of the year for the D.A.

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A number of setbacks had caused Voldemort much displeasure recently. The majority of his followers had been incarcerated in Azkaban prison. Not all of them, thankfully but enough to put a dent in his operations. It turned out that Snape had misled him, that the connection between himself and Potter had not existed. Exactly how it was terminated, Voldemort could only begin to guess. Potter had exposed his return to the entire world and now the Ministry would be on alert, not that it would do those fools much of any good. Most importantly, Potter had given him the wrong prophecy, the vital information that he required was replaced by a taunting message that mocked him. Potter would pay for what he did, not only did he mock the most powerful wizard that ever lived but he had robbed him of ever having an opportunity to hear the prophecy that had given Potter his status again.

One consolation was that Dumbledore had not regained his former status. Not that Dumbledore had ceased to be a thorn, but he could not officially maneuver against Voldemort.

"Enter, Severus," prompted Voldemort to a knock on the door and Snape walked in, with Voldemort holding his wand. "Crucio."

Snape's knees buckled before he collapsed in the ground in pain. The struggles to keep from screaming had only increased the pain. Dumbledore had warned him that the Dark Lord may blame him for the entire incident in the Department of Mysteries.

"To your feet Severus," said Voldemort coldly and Snape did as he was told. "Let me make one thing perfectly clear, if I did not need a Potions master such as yourself, you would be disposed of for what you've done. Withholding vital information, you mislead me and now Severus, each and every one of my plans have been set back. Do you understand the damage you have caused?"

"Yes, my Lord," said Snape painfully, as his nerves still ached from being punished by Voldemort.

"Excellent, you better know soon where your priorities lie, because one thing is for certain, if you believe you can continue to defy me in such a manner by withholding vital information, you will be sadly mistaken," said Voldemort softly. "If I was not impressed with your abilities to concoct potions, you would be finished. Now dismissed and don't fail me again, Severus or I shall look into a replacement to fulfill your duties."

Snape pulled himself to his feet and walked off. If he did not know any better, Potter had managed to find a way to manipulate his own mind to make Snape believe that it was weak. Not that Snape would ever believe it, the boy was arrogant, without one bit of cunning in his body. There was no way that Potter could ever make anything that convincing that he would have never picked up on at all.

Harry and Ginny arrived at Number Twelve Grimmauld Place. It was Hogsmeade weekend, the last one of the year, so it was the perfect time to slip away to interrogate the newest guest of the house. Harry and Ginny walked inside, where Tonks sat outside, looking rather tired and irritated.

“Harry, Ginny, great you’re here, our prisoner has been a royal pain,” said Tonks. “She’s been making a racket and yelling how she’s going to kill us all. It took all of us to subdue her to force the sedative potion down her throat to calm her down and she didn’t even have a wand.”

“Well, she was a problem in Azkaban, with all of those Dementors around even,” said Harry.

“Good thing she’s behind all that magically reinforced metal,” added Ginny.

“Yes and she’s secure, as well, but that metal, not even Moony could break through it when he was fully transformed on the full moon,” added Sirius. “Exactly how much longer do we have to have Bellatrix here before we get rid of her?”

“Until we make her lead us to the Cup,” responded Harry. “You do realize that I have to go inside to talk to her, she’s not going to be exactly all that up front with giving me any information. Ginny stay out here, I don’t want to put you in any danger.”

“I know,” responded Ginny, as she gave Harry a quick kiss. “Just be careful in there, Lestrage is mentally unstable and could surprise you even without a wand.”

“All of her inmates that she killed or maimed when in Azkaban, I know, but I’m ready,” said Harry as he walked inside, before he tapped his wand on the door three times, which caused it to open. The door was set to only respond to either him or Ginny. Harry stepped inside, as Bellatrix was secured in a magically reinforced straightjacket. “You know why I’m here, Lestrage.”

“To rub in the fact that you defeated me,” spat Bellatrix angrily. “You’re just like your mother Potter, taking great pleasure in making

people suffer. You enjoy playing with lives but it will come back to bite you in the end.”

“I’m here for information, nothing more,” said Harry calmly. “We can do this the easy way or we can do this the hard way, I really don’t care.”

“You really think I’m going to betray everything I know about the Dark Lord, because you asked me, don’t you Potter?” asked Bellatrix. “You think I’m going to spill my guts, betraying the only person that has ever had my best interests in mind. You must be nearly as whacked in the head as I am to think that I would ever betray the Dark Lord.”

“Riddle used you, Lestrangle and deep down you know it as well,” said Harry coolly.

“All I know is the Dark Lord will kill you and I will celebrate his victory, he will reward me for never betraying him,” said Bellatrix stubbornly. “The longer I remain here, the more I will make your loved ones suffer once I escape.”

“The Hufflepuff Cup, Lestrangle, you will lead me to it,” said Harry.

“When the Dark Lord struck you with the killing curse, it must have scrambled some of your brain cells, if you think you are going to just make me lead you to the Cup,” answered Bellatrix in a forced calmness, but a wicked, murderous look appeared in her eyes. “If you’re asking about it, I’m sure you understand exactly how precious of a treasure that the Dark Lord and I’d rather chop off all of my limbs then betray him in such of a heinous manner. I’m not Lucius Malfoy or Severus Snape, I joined the Dark Lord because I believe in what he’s doing, not what he can do for me.”

“Nice speech, very inspiring,” said Harry dryly. “But one way or another I will get the Hufflepuff Cup.”

“Oh, is ickle baby Potter going to put Bella under the Imperius Curse and make her walk him to the cup?” asked Bellatrix with a half amused, half irritated look on her face. “Because my mind is rather complex and something like the Imperius Curse will not work on me.”

“Imperius Curse, do I look like your abysmal failure of a Dark Lord?” asked Harry and Bellatrix attempted to rip the straight jacket off, so she could strangle Potter for his mockery of the Dark Lord but it failed. Harry prepared to delve into her mind, to see how much he could find.

“I wouldn’t do that if I were you,” sang Bellatrix but she allowed Potter to take his trip into her mind.

Harry backed off almost immediately after less than a minute in Bellatrix’s mind. He had seen enough to make him wretch in disgust. Bellatrix’s mind looked like it had been struck with every natural disaster known to man, simultaneously. It was completely ravaged from years of dark arts abuse, dating back to just after her first year at Hogwarts, even though it appeared that Bellatrix was deluding herself that it did not begin until in her mind, Sirius had shunned her. Obviously the reality was there among the delusions that Bellatrix had built up. The most disturbing thing was that Bellatrix had considered Voldemort to be a father figure to her, while simultaneously having several erotic fantasies about him. Given what little Harry was able to find out again her relationship with her own father.

His personal diagnosis was that Bellatrix Lestrange was absolutely messed up beyond all help. It did explain to an extent the ugly turn her life took, but it did not excuse all of the murders she did.

“Sicken you, Potter?” asked Bellatrix who looked amused. “That just barely scrapes the surface. You know every year on their birthday where some kids blow out their candles. Well after he had a bit too much to drink, Daddy had me blow...”

Harry silenced Bellatrix immediately, he did not need her to finish that sentence. It would take years of study and a strong constitution to completely study Bellatrix’s mind to determine the extent of the damage. Right now Harry had looked in her mind to know that she was completely and utterly beyond all help. He had never felt such a strong combination of sympathy and revulsion.

"Let me just say one thing, Lestrangle, you have overstayed your welcome here, so don't get too comfortable," said Harry. "Once I figure out how to get the Hufflepuff Cup..."

Harry left his words hanging as he left as Ginny, Sirius, and Tonks stood on the outside.

"She didn't try to attack you, did she?" asked Ginny and Harry shook his head.

"No, her mind is...how to I put this nicely..." stated Harry.

"Messed up beyond all repair," offered Sirius. "Bella was always rather quirky when we were kids, she kept to herself mostly, but was always interested in learning new magic. She fell right into the dark arts and that was the beginning of the end for her. Azkaban I imagine did a number on her mind and caused her descent into madness. The end result is what you see right before you."

"Yes, I can see, you said she was out of her mind, but just a minute in her mind clarified that even more than I wanted it," said Harry. "Her mind has been completely shredded to pieces from overexposure to dark magic, what little sanity she has left is not enough to matter. Her mind is unable to tell any differences from what really happened and what her own fractured sanity has concocted."

"In other words, Dark Magic Dependency at its most advanced stage, with the most damage done to the mind without death," said Ginny, recalling the books about the psychology of the dark arts on the mind. "The perfect weapon for Voldemort to use, as she would kill anyone he asked her to without any remorse, because she has tricked herself into thinking that Voldemort is the only one that has her best interests in mind."

"You hit it perfectly, Ginny," responded Harry as he tried to block out some of the images that he saw and that was just with a minute in her mind. If he had spent any more time in his captive's mind, he shuddered to think what he might find in the deepest darkest recesses of that mind.

"It might be more humane to put her out of her misery, for everyone involved," suggested Tonks. Normally she would not be so quick to condemn someone like this but she had read enough about her aunt to know differently. The crimes she committed had been absolutely horrifying and during her trial, the records indicated that she had showed no remorse, only amusement.

"In time, Tonks, but first the Cup is most important, we'll find a way to make her give us all the information we need," said Harry, as while he knew the cup was in Bellatrix's vault, the information of what vault number was Bellatrix's had not been in Voldemort's memories. Harry supposed if he dug around enough, he might be able to find it, but without tipping off the goblins or anyone else, it might cause more trouble than we can afford to deal with. I'll find a way to get what I need."

"Yes, that information has to be somewhere in all of those disturbing memories," said Ginny as her and Harry walked off to take the portkeys back to Hogsmeade. Now their business was over for now, they looked forward to enjoying a nice afternoon in Hogsmeade together

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The final with Ravenclaw had occurred just a little over two weeks before the Ordinary Wizarding Level exams were supposed to stop and needless to say, Gryffindor pulled out all of the stops. While their impressive victories over Slytherin and Hufflepuff had put them far and away in the lead, without being in one point behind, the tide could change and they fought Ravenclaw with everything they had. It helped that Ravenclaw had basically sealed their own fate, by taking a more Slytherin like approach of bending the rules slightly to try and push ahead once they fell behind by almost two hundred points. There was just one problem, while Ravenclaw was the second best team in Hogwarts right now, they did not get that way by adapting a style of play that worked well for more vicious and in most cases larger members of the Slytherin house team and they failed immediately.

The final score was a breath taking seven hundred and eighty points to zero, in one of the most impressive victories in Hogwarts Quidditch history. Ginny had very nearly let the Quaffle in a couple of times, because she was too busy laughing at the pathetic efforts of the Ravenclaw Chasers playing a type of a game that they were not suited for.

"We did it!" shouted Angelina in a pleased voice, as she ended her final game at Hogwarts on a high note. "We've won."

"We didn't only win," said George with a smug expression.

"We swept them," added Fred as Harry and Ginny embraced, as several Gryffindors made their way onto the field. They ended a rather passionate kiss to slink off in the sea of humanity, to enjoy their celebration in a more private atmosphere.

In the shadows, away from everyone else, Hermione sat with a sulky look on her face. She did not care all that much for Quidditch, but she had attended the game on the off chance that a Bludger would crack Ginny's skull open. Unfortunately, she could not be as lucky this time. She watched, it should be been her congratulating Harry. It should have been her kissing Harry. It should have been her sneaking off with Harry to enjoy some private time. Hermione was getting more and more enraged that every minute that she saw Ginny, she was never alone. If Harry was not there, then others would be.

It was almost like they had found out what Hermione was up to. Yet, that was impossible, she was the smartest witch of her age, she had been rather discrete with anything. Sure Ron and Umbridge had found out, but she had taken care of Ron, if he valued his life, he would not breath one word of this to anyone. Umbridge needed Hermione to uncover any information about Harry that would help her, not that Hermione was making much progress. Harry had kept his cards rather close to his chest. Before, Hermione could read him like a picture book and now she could not even get a sense of what he was thinking.

It was because of Ginny's influence, she had corrupted Harry so much he forgot who his true friends were. Hermione felt she was

doing Harry a great disservice in not stepping up her efforts to help Harry escape Ginny's clutches.

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The first week of examinations had occurred and right now Ginny walked down, to await Harry. She was rather disheartened when she could not take the O.. Despite being a fourth year, she was more than ready for them as was Luna, but the Hogwarts bylaws stated the students were not allowed to take their exams early, no matter what the circumstances for. It was rather strange that she was allowed to be a prefect a year early, but not allowed to take her O..

Harry hardly needed to study and for good reason. He was more than qualified to teach the majority of the core Hogwarts subjects right now with the knowledge he did. It both spoke well on Harry's abilities and the shoddy standards for teachers. Not that Ginny thought the teachers were bad, many of them, like McGonagall and Flitwick were among the top of their fields. Others were scarcely qualified.

Ginny tapped her foot, Luna was going to meet her down here, to greet Harry and Neville, but she must have gotten tied up with something.

"Hello Ginny," said a quiet voice from the shadows and Ginny quickly went on full defensive mode when she realized that Hermione stood in the shadows, with a calculating expression on her face. "Harry won't be finished taking his exams for another few minutes yet, I think it's awful you have to sit out here and wait for him."

Ginny stood there and Hermione was pleased, there was no one in the hallways. She finally had Ginny alone at last.

"What do you want?" demanded Ginny, even though she knew what Hermione wanted.

"Ginny, let's not play dumb, you stole Harry away from me, you took advantage of him at a crucial moment and seduced him away from his true friends," said Hermione and she was purely mad. "It almost

worked and you almost got away with it, but now, everything is back the way it was.”

Quickly, without warning, Hermione raised her wand and threw the first dangerous and potentially lethal spell she could think of at Ginny. It was a nasty charm that could burn the flesh off of an adversary’s face and eat through the skull before shredding the brain to pieces if given enough power. The books warned that only an advanced witch or wizard could use it or otherwise it could backfire with disastrous consequences. However, Hermione ignored those warnings, she was one of the most brilliant witches of her age, so of course she would be able to use that spell to make Ginny pay.

Ginny instinctively put up a shield but as it turned out that was not needed. A loud, nearly ear shattering explosion echoed through the corridor and Hermione was blown backwards as a black ball of light exploded in her face. She crashed to the ground as the end of her wand was completely charred. Ginny recognized the spell immediately, it was one of the one’s that Harry had made her, Luna, and Neville promise that they would never use, because of the chances that it would blow up in their faces were way too high.

Hermione laid on the ground, screaming in absolute blood curdling agony, as she clutched her face. Several loud shrieks echoed throughout the entire school as the doors from the Great Hall opened with Professor McGonagall leading the way. The Hogwarts Headmistress gasped as she saw Hermione, in absolutely pain. Several of the students, including Harry walked out to see Ginny standing in the distance in shock.

“She tried to attack you?” asked Harry and Ginny nodded her head, as Harry pulled her in, he could smell the putrid odor of dark magic gone horrible. Snape and Flitwick were on the scene immediately as McGonagall was yelling orders to Snape and Flitwick that neither Harry nor Ginny heard because they were too shocked at what happened.

“The one time I let my guard down, the one time I was alone, she almost got me,” said Ginny in a horrified voice.

“All that matters is you’re fine and safe,” replied Harry calmly, but the smell of rotting flesh turned his stomach.

“It happened, she tried to...oh Merlin,” said Ron in horror as he had just walked out, as he caught a look at Hermione’s face and recoiled in absolute shock. He had thought that Hermione would never do it, she would never actually try and kill Ginny. Yet the dark arts had claimed his friend and had come close to killing her. Ron could not help feeling guilty, he wished he had done more to help, that he could have pressed Dumbledore more when he was here, before Hermione put that curse on him to silence him.

“Miss Weasley, we need to get Miss Granger to St. Mungos to get specialized treatment, but you need to come as well, to tell us exactly what happened,” said Snape in a calm voice, even though he had an idea what spell Granger might have tried. “Your eye witness account may hold vital information in stabilizing her condition.”

Ginny turned to protest but Harry shook his head. He mouthed: “I’ll explain later”, to his girlfriend and Ginny nodded. Hermione was being hauled onto a stretcher as she continued to shriek, as McGonagall and Madam Pomfrey, who had just arrived, attempted to gently pry Hermione’s fingers away from her face. Her body went into spasms, as the charred remains of her wand were confiscated by McGonagall for evidence.

Hermione was still alive but only barely.

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Umbridge quickly gathered up her things to head to St. Mungos. If Granger had revealed in any way that she knew that the Mudblood was practicing the dark arts and tried to blackmail the girl for her own benefits, it would be the end of any hopes she would have in becoming Minister of Magic. She slipped a vial of poison into her robe pocket that she had confiscated from Severus’s private stores and stepped towards the Floo.

Granger needed to be silenced immediately.

And Chapter Twenty Seven is in the books. Coming up next, Umbridge's last stand and some other strange twists in the coming chapters that may very well inspire some controversy, but will hopefully make sense when everything is all said and done.

Chapter Twenty Eight: Rehabilitation

The incident where Hermione Granger had attempted to throw a deadly dark curse at Ginny Weasley had spread throughout Hogwarts like wildfire, along with the fact that it backfired to disastrous. In fact, by the time the girl was stabilized and carted off to St. Mungos to get the treatment she needed, even though recovery was going to be a long and rocky road. Right now, Harry, Ginny, and Ron stood with Snape and McGonagall as Hermione was currently on a bed in critical condition as the healers inside attempted to secure her.

"Miss Granger is in a very serious state right now," remarked a healer who walked from the room, as there were several more pained screams coming from Hermione. "It was lucky she did not have enough power to completely execute that curse, otherwise she would have been dead before she had even hit the ground. What is her bloodline?"

"Muggleborn," responded McGonagall in a voice of forced calmness and the healer nodded shortly.

"No need to inform her parents then," responded the healer swiftly as she turned back to the hospital room.

"Of course they need to know, they're her parents," said Ron in an agitated voice.

"Mr. Weasley, unfortunately, the laws state that the parents or guardians of Muggleborn witches and wizards have no rights regarding their own children once they turn eleven, the duty falls on the Hogwarts headmaster or headmistress," responded McGonagall and Harry and Ginny exchanged looks not of surprise, but of absolute revulsion. "I just wish Dumbledore was here, he would know how to handle this better than me."

"But they're her parents," responded Ron stubbornly, as he was appalled what he just learned. "Surely they're going to find out eventually."

"Yes, Mr. Weasley, they will find out eventually, once it is known whether Miss Granger lives or dies," said Snape calmly as he stepped forward. "Come Miss Weasley, I may need your recollection of the events to properly piece together...I did not ask you to come Mr. Potter."

"I wasn't waiting for your invitation, Snape," responded Harry calmly. "If Ginny goes, I need to as well, as I need to know about what treatments I need to pay for if Hermione survives, because something's obviously wrong with her to cause her to use such a dark curse without worrying about the consequences."

Ginny's eyes turned to Harry, before she immediately got where Harry was going with this. His plan bordered on sheer brilliance, it was so amazing, the determination in his eyes to do this one thing, it would secure Dumbledore's trust in him, if he would try and give someone a second chance. The Elder Wand was almost assured with this act. Sure she was a bit miffed about nearly getting killed, but now even Hermione would learn her lesson about dabbling in magic beyond her comprehension.

"Indeed," responded Snape, as he wondered what Mr. Potter's game was, actually it appeared both Potter and Miss Weasley were up to something but what he did not know. He really could care less technically, as he knew they were Gryffindors and thus not capable of complex plans. It was most likely that both were foolishly naïve and willing to give someone a second chance.

"I'm coming too as Hermione's my friend," said Ron firmly and Harry and Ginny just gave noncommittal nods as if he was a nonentity, as they turned towards the room where Hermione was.

"Very well then, come with me but do stand back so I can do my work," said Snape coolly as the three teenagers followed Snape, with McGonagall closely behind as the healers were crowded around Hermione. Hermione's face looked like raw hamburger, her lip was swollen and discolored a purple color.

"The prognosis is not good but it could be worse," stated the healer. "It appears Miss Granger will live but she will never be the same ever

again. Her face will be covered with a number of disfiguring scars and it looks as if she was blinded in her right eye. A severe amount of nerve damage occurred when the curse backfired, so there is nothing that can be fixed with magic, I'm afraid."

"Describe to me the curse that Miss Granger attempted to hit you with, Miss Weasley," responded Snape calmly.

"Black, it was a large circular shape, almost like a sphere, as it kept growing, until it combusted right in Hermione's face," explained Ginny as Harry clutched her hand in support but Snape nodded, he immediately knew exactly what curse that Miss Granger went for.

"It is extremely lucky that Miss Granger is not that powerful, it could have had more disastrous consequences if the events had unfolded differently," responded Snape as it appeared Miss Granger had decided to swipe a couple of books from the Black family library. He had warned Dumbledore just to leave that place alone, to work with Black in sealing it off, but he had to just remove the books and no doubt Molly Weasley, in a moment of infinite wisdom, had children help clean the books out, that they may very be tempted to take more than a look at. "I believe the healers will be able to repair most of the damage still can be, there is nothing I can do other than that. The drastic disfigurement curse, no matter how uninspired its name seems to be, can be an unstable weapon in even the most trained hands. In one that was less than trained, well the results are right there in front of you to analyze."

"Yes, agreed," responded one of the healers severely as a series of spells hit Hermione's face. It repaired some of her skin but the dark magic that blew up in her face had disfigured her beyond all repair. Her right eye was damaged, as the healers did more tests, directed towards the mind of Hermione. Ginny and Harry sat back, with Snape and McGonagall standing slightly back. Ron stepped forward to look at Ginny and Harry.

"After all of what happened, you two don't have to be here," said Ron calmly, as Hermione's behavior against both Harry and Ginny had been rather rotten, mostly Ginny, but to an extent Harry as well. Hermione had treated Harry as if he had no right to have his own

opinions with her input. Truthfully, he would not blame either of them if they did everything in their power to get Hermione sent to Azkaban, as much as it pained him to admit it. He wanted to warn them as well, but thanks to the curse that Hermione put on him, Ron could do nothing. He was afraid of dying and would Harry and Ginny even believe him anyway?

"We don't have to be here, but it's something that is necessary," responded Harry with a determined look on his face as him and Ginny held hands, as they both knew what needed to be done, without saying anything.

"We need to know what lead Hermione down this road," added Ginny.

"Well that's obvious, Hermione is obsessed with making Harry her boyfriend and doesn't give a damn what happens to anyone else," said Ron as if he was proud to come to a conclusion that Harry and Ginny had not.

"Partially true, but not complete, there is a deeper reason than that," said Ginny as she looked at Harry who nodded. "Not everyone just throws dangerous dark arts curses without heeding the consequences. Something has to be wrong with her."

Ginny stopped she could not say anymore without revealing to Ron, along with McGonagall and Snape all her and Harry knew about the dangerous side effects of dark magic, the damage it could do to the human mind if not used in moderation. How it lead to mass delusions, distortions to reality, and complete mental breakdowns, not to mention a complete elimination of any morals. The most advanced case was currently held prisoner at Number Twelve Grimmauld place.

"Well we've completed a scan on the mind of Hermione Granger and what we found is disturbing, but rather treatable," concluded the healer as she looked at the group seriously. "Miss Granger appears to have an early version of Dark Arts Dependency Syndrome. A very harmless version, providing that the patient does not use the dark arts but I found evidence that Miss Granger has been using the dark arts regularly for at least a year. Her mind is degrading at an astounding rate, it appears that she has thrown herself into the dark

arts with reckless abandon. I'm rather curious that no one at Hogwarts has even found out that she was practicing dark arts. The signs are noticeable, even underneath the scarring, you can see the rings under her eyes and the blood shot eyes. Glamour charms could cover the damage up, for a time, but an observant eye would even get some hint, as she would have to be in classes all day without a chance to practice the dark arts and would suffer withdrawal symptoms."

Ron had noticed and once again, he wished he had not directly confronted Hermione about what happened, rather he should have gone straight to McGonagall. Then again, he was reminded that when he went to Dumbledore, Dumbledore had said there was nothing to worry about. Ron had believed Dumbledore but now through the former Headmaster's actions, his father was killed and Hermione was almost killed.

"Yes, I do agree, it might have been noticeable, if we all had not been preoccupied by other matters," said Snape, as he had noticed something off about Miss Granger all year, but had attributed to the normal teenage angst. Besides with Umbridge watching his every move and the Dark Lord's lack of patience, Snape had little time to worry about a Gryffindor Muggleborn with everything else going on.

"Umbridge," moaned Hermione suddenly before she attempted to lift her head up but failed.

"What was that Hermione?" asked Harry, as he began to put the pieces together. Umbridge had found out and most likely used Hermione for her own purposes. It was a bit clever, more so than he would ever give her credit for. Hermione's body gave a small shake, she looked around. It was obvious that she was struggling to comprehend everything that was going on around her."

"Harry is that you?" asked Hermione in a delirious voice, as she tried to shake the cobwebs but a pounding sound echoed through her head. "Ginny, are you there too?"

"Yes, Hermione, we're here," answered Ginny in an uneasy voice as her and Harry had their wands ready. Even though Hermione was

unarmed, they still were not going to take any chances. Hermione was mentally unstable judging by the report of the healer and it would be foolish not to be on their guard, even if she appeared to be indisposed.

"Lovely, I know that neither of you would abandon me, you're my true friends, both of you, you know that," responded Hermione in a hazy voice, as Ron balled his fists up angrily. He had tried to stand behind Hermione though all this, despite all of her problems and now Hermione once again had ignored him, as if he was less than nothing. "I don't know, more than I deserve, for you to be here, after what happened, what I did."

"You know what you did," replied Harry calmly, as he wondered if this backfired curse had knocked some sense into Hermione, at least temporarily.

"I tried to kill Ginny, for what I thought she did, the voices, they told me, that you should be mine, we were meant to be together," answered Hermione. "We thought we could make everything right by taking her out but we know it was a mistake, we'll never do it again, you must hate us."

"She's hearing voices, a classic sign of Dark Arts Dependency," offered Snape, even though Harry and Ginny had both already known that. Both the voices in the head, whether they were there to begin with or retroactively imagined to explain the behavior, both qualities were explained.

"Do you hate us Harry?" asked Hermione in a saddened voice, she wanted nothing more to have Harry and Ginny to be her friends again. The mistakes she made, it caused her to turn to her mind, it caused her to fall into the temptation of dark magic, and it was all her fault.

"Hermione, we're disappointed in what you've done," said Harry, which was of course an understatement, he was completely sickened what Hermione had tried to do to Ginny, but also Hermione was sick, the dark arts had taken over her mind and might have destroyed it.

"It's not any less than I deserve, I've been a bitch to both of you over the past year and a half," muttered Hermione as she was confused at exactly what happened. There appeared to be a voice of some sort that pushed her to learn the dark arts, just like when she freaked out when she thought Harry had tricked the Goblet of Fire. She felt jealousy not only when Harry was with Ginny, but how happy he seemed to be with her and was disheartened when no matter how hard she tried, she could never make Harry that happy in his life. All she did was nag him about not completing his homework on time and make him feel inadequate.

Harry and Ginny exchanged a look at Hermione's completely blunt, but totally accurate, assessment of her own recent behavior. She appeared to still not be all there mentally, her voice dropped to an inaudible whisper before her body began to shake madly. Harry and Ginny backed off as the healers moved as Hermione's body thrashed into wild fists.

"Her body is violently reacting violently to our attempts to stabilize her!" shouted one of the healers frantically, as they held their wands but Hermione attempted to snap the straps. A window blew up, sending glass everyone.

"Let me go, I have to...do it...no I can't...but I have to...no...MAKE IT STOP!" shouted Hermione in a delirious voice as she continued to go into fits. "The suffering...too much..."

One of the healers managed to hold Hermione's head steady so another one could tip a mild sedative potion into her mouth. Her body shuddered, as it still shook but not as badly as her frantic attempts to free herself were a minute again. Her eyes held a mad, but somehow lost and helpless look in them. As book smart she was, her mind was not able to hold up as well under the strain of performing dark magic. The abuse was evident.

"This will only hold her for a few moments, a stronger sedative is needed to completely stabilize her," said the healer as another went off to retrieve the sedative and she turned to the rest of the group. "Only then can I do a more comprehensive scan on her brain, to see

exactly how much damage has been caused and what I can do to fix it, if there is anything that can be done to fix it.”

“Gold is no objective,” responded Harry as Ginny nodded in agreement and Ron looked at them in surprise. He wanted to kick them, scream at both of them. Hermione had just tried to kill Ginny, yet they were helping her. Then again Hermione was his friend and he wanted to see her get better. Of course, Hermione put that curse on him and continued to treat him like dirt, but Ron knew Hermione never would really do anything to hurt him. It was all confusing, he was getting a headache from this entire mess. He longed for the days where it was just trying to figure out how to keep You-Know-Who away from the Philosopher’s Stone.

Harry sat there as the healer turned to Hermione. He had been unable to follow up with the Umbridge line much to his displeasure. If he could get something, anything to implicate Umbridge on, it would ruin her career and by extension Fudge’s. Fudge had outlived his usefulness as far as Harry was concerned. He had is use to allow Harry to get his foot inside the Ministry and piece together some important contacts. Now with Harry having a fair bit of influence, he no longer needed Fudge. He could begin planting the seeds for the changes that needed to be made.

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The young healer walked down the hallway to obtain a stronger sedative potion when a figure appeared in the hallway, with a vial in her hand and a vile, sadistic look on her toad like face.

“Hem, hem,” said Umbridge as she looked at the healer. “I understand that a young Hogwarts student, by the name of Hermione Granger, has been taken ill.”

“Technically speaking yes she has, I need to get her a sedative potion to keep her body from having these attacks, until we can find a way to heal her,” said the young healer and the face of Umbridge broke into a grin.

"I am Dolores Umbridge, the Senior Undersecretary for the Ministry of Magic and the Hogwarts High Inquisitor and it is imperative that this potion finds its way into Miss Granger's system, she is unstable and potentially dangerous, a matter of Ministry security," said Umbridge as she held the vial of poison in her hand and reached forward. "You will be doing your country a great service if you do this one minor task."

"I'm afraid that's impossible Madam Umbridge, St. Mungos regulations state that the patients cannot be given potions of any kind that are not made by a trained healer from the hospital, it would be a breach of etiquette that could cost me my license," said the young healer but Dolores sighed, before she reached into the pocket of her robe, removing a handful of gold from her pocket and casually placing them into the hand of the healer, who's eyes widened before he greedily stuffed them into his pocket and took the potion. "But I'm sure I can make an exception for a respected and highly regarded Ministry official such as yourself."

"I knew you would see things my way," said Umbridge smugly watching the healer leave with the new found bulge in his pocket as she casually hung around in the corridor to witness the fruits of her efforts. After all, who would tie her into this, when the nature of the poison she paid the healer to give Miss Granger would make it seem like she suffered a death based on side effects based on the curse that she foolishly tried to use on the Weasley girl. It was a shame she never collected any information on Potter but if she learned anything when working in the Ministry, plans never went as assumed. At least the world would have one less Mudblood. That had to account for something.

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Harry and Ginny sat next to each other, as they look at in each other's eyes. Hermione needed to survive, Harry's future plans involving Dumbledore hinged on her ability to live. That fact and a fact that a small part of Harry was wounded that someone he had once considered to be just as good as a sister to him would ever fall this far into the abyss of madness. The Hermione they knew for three years was different than the one they had known recently and for all they

knew, once she was treated, there would be a completely different Hermione than those two versions of their former friend.

Harry looked up as the young healer that was sent to retrieve the sedative potion and immediately, he had caught something rather unsettling in the face of this young healer. It was almost an uneasy, nervous look. Harry looked at the vial in the healer's hand and his eyes widened. It was time for drastic action. One of the healers secured Hermione's head as a second healer prepared to pour the vial of what Harry immediately recognized as poison down her throat. However, before the healer could administer the potion, the vial flew into Harry's hand.

"What is the meaning of this?" demanded the young healer but he was sweating, as he saw Potter look over the vial.

"Professor Snape, perhaps you should enlighten us what this potion is," offered Harry and Snape looked it over.

"It is a rare, undetectable, slow acting poison, that once the victim is dead, it would be as if they suffered a brain aneurysm," responded Snape softly as he turned to the young healer who paled under his glare. "Very convenient as it could have been a potential side effect of the curse that backfired on Miss Granger as well, I trust there is an explanation for this."

Snape looked at the young healer, who cowered like a first year Gryffindor as those piercing black eyes were on them, with infinite coldness.

"She gave it to me, gave me some Galleons to administer it, she said was a matter of Ministry security," said the young healer fearfully as he trembled underneath the glare of Snape.

"A name would be handy to determine exactly whom is the culprit behind this," said Snape despite the fact he had a shrewd suspicion who made a desperate attempt to poison Miss Granger and the healer seemed to be intelligent enough to avert his eyes.

"Keep in mind Healer Peters, you are in danger of losing your license because of this action, so you best tell us who and we at St. Mungos might persuade the Ministry of Magic to go easy on you," said the lead healer sternly as Peters quivered.

"Umbridge, Dolores Umbridge, she told me to do it, I didn't want to get brought up on charges, you know how the Ministry of Magic is!" shouted Peters in a horrified voice as Harry leaned casually, to look around the corner, as Ginny did the same. While Snape, McGonagall, and to a lesser extent Ron, was distracted by the drama involving the healer trying to poison Hermione.

"Toad at twelve o'clock," muttered Harry to Ginny as Harry casually got up before he slipped into the hallway. He could see Umbridge casually backing off, as if not to make a scene for her sudden departure. "Fancy meeting you here, Dolores."

"Mr. Potter, I trust you're here to make sure Miss Granger gets what she deserves," said Umbridge calmly but Harry could tell she was calculating some plan of attack, not that it would work.

"Umbridge, I know it was you who tried to poison Hermione and I know I'm right when I say that you discovered her use of dark magic, before blackmailing her in some attempt to get incriminating information on me," said Harry as Umbridge looked him straight in the eye a mistake on her part. Her mind was the simplest. "You won't even be able to politic your way out of attempted murder, Umbridge."

"So what Potter, I thought you would be glad that I did you a favor, she did try and kill your girlfriend," said Umbridge smugly but Harry just stood there, without blinking, without any expression on his face whatsoever, as he put some silencing and anti-eavesdropping charms around the area, along with a Confundus barrier. He wanted his fun with Umbridge to not be interrupted.

"She has an ailment that she needs treated Umbridge and you won't doing me any favors, you were trying to save your own status," said Harry as he saw Umbridge point her wand at him. Her technique needed work. "I wouldn't do that if I were you, Umbridge, attacking

me might get you a nice kiss, perhaps the first one you've ever had in your life."

Umbridge's face contorted into an ugly scowl as she lifted her wand, once again telegraphing the fact that she was going to attack.

"Crucio," said Umbridge, as Harry marveled at her arrogance, she really thought she could get away with everything. Her curse was a bit slower than Voldemort's so he easily avoided it. Several more curses were thrown at Harry at rapid fire succession and Umbridge smirked before she saw that Harry stood before her, having blocked or dodged all of the attempted curses she thrown at him.

"Are you done yet?" asked Harry calmly as he looked at Umbridge without fear on his face but obviously Umbridge was not done yet, despite how fatigued she looked by throwing that many curses that strained the limits of her ability to perform magic in such a short time. "Because the next curse you throw at me is your last freebie, I will fight back, so you better make it count."

"AVADA KEDAVRA!" yelled Umbridge but she collapsed immediately, as a light green light, nowhere nearly as powerful or dangerous as the normal Killing Curse flew towards Harry. Harry just calmly put up a shield where absorbed the spell. He walked over, as Umbridge was on her hands and knees, as she reached for her wand, but Harry stepped on her hands to prevent her from getting the wand. Another blast and Umbridge was secured in shackles. Harry hoisted her up and dropped her outside of the hospital room, where the occupants of the room gasped.

"I would suggest calling some Aurors, the Minister of Magic might be very interested in finding out what Madam Umbridge has been up to," responded Harry calmly as one of the healers nodded, before she walked over to a fireplace.

"This is Healer Thompson, we have a situation up on the fourth floor, room two twelve, contact the Ministry, the Department of Magical Law Enforcement, a Dolores Umbridge bribed one of our healers in an attempt to murder a patient in a believed attempt to cover up a

crime,” said Harry as Umbridge attempted to struggle against her shackles, but found this effort to be a futile one.

“You can’t prove anything Potter,” responded Umbridge in a snide tone of voice but before Harry responded Hermione managed to look up, in a slightly dazed tone but she was a bit more focused than she was earlier.

“Don’t play innocent Umbridge, you encouraged what I did, when I needed help, to turn me against my friends,” said Hermione calmly. “You tried to blackmail me, you could care less what happened to me, as long as you used me to serve your vendetta against Harry. I hope you rot for what you did to me and tried to do to Harry and Ginny. The Ministry will..”

With that Hermione screamed as if her head was on fire and the Healers moved in to secure her as she trashed. Umbridge attempted to get out but found the restraints that Potter had put her in had left no room whatsoever for escape. The fact that McGonagall turned to her, wand on Umbridge and Potter had her wand, offered even less attempt for escape. The Aurors would surely check her wand and even Cornelius would not be able to keep her from going into Azkaban, although Dolores would be damned if the Minister was not going down with her on this occasion. In retrospective, attempting attack Potter had been a foolish move, if he had not been here, she would have gotten away from silencing Granger, she knew it. Still, even with all of her connections, this might be the end of her. Potter was going to destroy the carefully structured Wizarding World with his meddling. Now he had too much influence in the Ministry, it would be better off if He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named killed him.

A healer moved off to stabilize Hermione with a sedative potion while the Aurors arrived. Harry and Ginny exchanged a look that signified that this was the end for Dolores Umbridge and the world would be much better with one corruptive influence out of the way.

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Harry and Ginny arrived at Hogwarts a couple of hours later in the Room of Requirement. The diagnosis would be that Hermione would

have to take a potion every day for the rest of her life to alleviate the dark tendencies in her mind. The healers made it crystal clear that it was essential for Hermione to take that potion, otherwise the Dark Arts Dependency would return with a vengeance, even greater than more and she would be even more delusion than she was before. The curse that backfired on Hermione had appeared to knock a small degree of sense back into her but Harry doubted that she would ever be completely mentally stable without constant aid. The potion that she required would keep her pretty much harmless.

“So do you think you could ever forgive Hermione?” asked Ginny suddenly.

“I’ve learned by now never say never, but it will be a long hard road for her to earn our forgiveness,” responded Harry with a sigh. “The potion will keep Hermione under control for the most part, not that she will want to try what she tried again after what happened. The reports, they said she was far gone and for her, it was lucky she made her mood now, otherwise we would not have had this opportunity and she would have been on the road to no recovery.”

“And you’ll look like a selfless hero that will help out someone in need to give them a second chance,” said Ginny with a smile as Harry nodded. “Perfect Harry, Dumbledore will trust you completely right now...”

“I think this was designed to see if I had grown in the hero that Dumbledore wanted me to be,” responded Harry and Ginny was taken aback. “Think about it, Hermione was allowed at Grimmauld Place, when she had no reason to be there. She was already jealous of us to begin with and Dumbledore encouraged your mother to clean the library out. It would be easy to sneak away a few books, I know, we’ve done it.”

“Then she would be able to learn the dark arts easily and would fall into it, besides if it had gone wrong, what would it matter to Dumbledore,” said Ginny.

“It worked out a little too well in the end, because I’ve been given the perfect opportunity to secure Dumbledore’s trust, by all logic, I could

have gotten whatever's left of Hermione's wand snapped and her thrown into Azkaban without looking back, but what would that accomplish?" asked Harry.

"Absolutely nothing," answered Ginny as she looked into Harry's eyes, she could barely contain herself. "Now the Elder Wand is as good as yours, all you need is the perfect opportunity to get it."

"It's as good as ours," corrected Harry as he they leaned forward into a triumphant kiss. Hermione was just collateral damage to their overall plans, if she returned back to a normal state, than that would be good but Harry and Ginny were not holding out hope that would that would happen. The treatments would keep her under control and as long as they made sure she stuck to them, they would not have to worry about her. Regardless of what happened, Hermione would serve a very vital purpose to their vision for change in the Wizarding World.

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Jean Granger clutched the letter in her hand that she received a couple of days ago nervously. She had always had reservations about her daughter going to a school that far away and even more once Hermione had become more and more withdrawn over years. At times her and her husband Walter had wanted to pull Hermione out, but they knew it was impossible. They had managed to find out as much about the Wizarding World as they could once Hermione had gotten her letter for Hogwarts. They were non-magical people, Muggles, so Hermione was considered less than dirt and they were considered even less than that. The only way a student could be pulled out of Hogwarts would be if they had one magical parent or guardian that would sign off. Obviously since they were both Muggles that would not happen and when they mentioned the subject after the incident where Hermione got petrified with by a giant snake, she remarked that the parents of Muggleborn students had their memories modified to believe their children had ran away when they attempted to pull them out of Hogwarts and the children were sent to families that the Ministry redeemed respectable. As dangerous as Hogwarts was, they did not want to lose Hermione.

This latest incident ever had caused them to weigh their options, to take Hermione on a plane the moment she got home and go hide out with some relatives they had abroad. The letter that her friend Harry had sent them had said Hermione was lucky not to be killed, when she was dabbling in some dangerous magic and none of the teachers made any connection that something was wrong had scared them. It had just shown how little they cared about anyone who was born outside of that world with the ability to perform magic.

“That’s Harry right now,” remarked Walter suddenly as he heard the door bell rang and Jean got up to answer the door, to allow Harry and a girl with flaming red hair and chocolate brown eyes to enter the house.

“Hello Mr. and Mrs. Granger, I do apologize for having to drop in on such short notice, I just finished off my Ordinary Wizarding Level examinations and I have a meeting that I need to attend tomorrow for the Wizengamot, the magical court,” said Harry as him and Ginny sat down. “This is my girlfriend Ginny Weasley.”

“Pleased to finally meet both of you in person,” said Jean as Harry and Ginny sat down. True she vaguely remembered seeing them both briefly at Diagon Alley, but they had never interacted with them.

“I’ll be blunt, Mrs. Granger, your daughter is very, very, lucky to be alive and she’ll never be the same again,” said Harry and Hermione’s parents nodded their heads. He felt bad having to be the one to relay this news to them, as they had done nothing to him. “Severe disfiguring scars and she’s blinded in her right eye. She’ll be up and ready by the time the school year ends...”

“You mentioned she was dabbling in some dangerous magic and was mentally unstable as a result of it,” said Jean in a worried voice. Her side of the family had a history of mental illness and she was afraid that Hermione now had the magical equivalent of that.

“She has something called Dark Arts Dependency, it’s a disorder, if they do not perform dark magic within a certain amount of time, their body will have violent reactions and over time it will shut down without

the proper treatment,” answered Harry quickly, as if it would cushion the pain of the explanation.

“Hermione will be getting the proper treatment,” added Ginny. “Harry has ensured of that, she needs to take a potion every day for the rest of her life, to balance out her mind and keep the dark tendencies locked in her mind.”

“Exactly how much do I owe you Harry?” asked Walter.

“Don’t worry about it Mr. Granger, everything’s take care of, right now, enough potion has been made to last her through every day of the summer and the first few months of Hogwarts,” answered Harry. “The cost would be steep, trust me, but I’ve taken care of it.”

“Hermione’s not going to go back to Hogwarts next year, we’re going to get her away from this mess as soon as possible,” said Walter firmly as he looked at Harry and Ginny, almost daring them to stop him.

“I’d actually agree with you but the thing is the Ministry of Magic won’t,” answered Harry.

“I know, we’ve learned about them, but once we get Hermione outside the country, they can’t do anything,” answered Walter but Harry shook his head.

“They have ways of tracking underage Muggleborn students, Mr. Granger, the Ministry likes to keep tabs on them,” said Ginny. “People like me and Harry, they could care less for the most part, but Hermione, she’s watched to make sure she doesn’t get out of sight.”

“Yes, most of the high ranking officials in the Ministry don’t care much for Muggleborns, but they sure like to keep them around,” said Harry as he was rather disgusted. “It is mandatory for Muggleborns to attend Hogwarts and if their parents try to stop them, well the Ministry has ways of making people disappear.”

“In other words, we have no say,” answered Jean in a defeated voice.

"I still think we should have a say, we're her parents," said Walter firmly.

"Not in the eyes of the Ministry, you're just animals and Hermione is property that belongs to the Wizarding World, you may have a say so inside the Muggle World but inside our world, the Ministry doesn't even bother to listen to any Muggles," said Harry who had tried to get that Muggleborn Guardianship Act law changed, but found it was like pulling teeth. "Even your government, which the Ministry was an outpost of originally has no authority. All it takes is a few wands being waved and the Ministry gets their way."

"That's awful," said Walter, who actually felt ashamed of all the times he complained about the government. The Ministry of Magic took corruption to an entirely new level.

"I'll make sure Hermione stays here with you during Holidays, it might be best after what happened if she takes some time off from the Wizarding World, well except for her make up date for her Ordinary Wizarding Level examinations which is in mid July," said Harry as the Grangers nodded.

"Hermione never seemed to connect all that well with us, after the first couple of years at Hogwarts," voiced Jean more to herself than to her husband, Harry, and Ginny. "When we were on holiday in France a couple of years ago, she seemed to want to learn about the local magical culture rather than to spend time with us."

"She never spent the holidays at home after the first year either, we just barely saw her during the summer holidays," said Walter, as his daughter was always withdrawn, but she became more and more disconnected from them as she got further into her magical education. "Do you really think you can convince her to stay home?"

"I think she'll listen to me," responded Harry as the Grangers exchanged curious looks. "Just don't try to run, because it will be worse for yourself and Hermione."

"Understood," said Walter, even though he did not like it.

“Lovely, if you don’t have any questions, Harry and I need to get going,” said Ginny with a yawn. They had both agreed not to mention Voldemort, they would leave that to Hermione, as an attempt to strengthen the relationship and the trust between her and her parents “It’s been a long day and Harry has a lot on his plate.”

“Of course,” said Jean as she waved them off, and they walked off. The moment they left, Walter had turned to her.

“It should have been up to Hermione’s Headmistress, that McGonagall woman, to tell us what happened, not Harry and Ginny,” said Walter.

“I know, but it was nice of Harry to go out of his way to do it, even though he didn’t really have to,” responded Jean. “He said he had a lot on his plate, it seemed to me that he had the too many responsibilities for someone his age to fulfill. Both of them in fact. I wonder why.”

“Maybe because no one else is willing to do anything,” said Walter thoughtfully as the visit of Harry and Ginny had given them much to think of and a rather disturbing idea of how the Ministry of Magic worked.

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“The Wizengamot is now in session for the trial of the accused Dolores Jane Umbridge, the charges are maliciously abusing a position of power, not assisting a student with an obvious illness, blackmail, and using two Unforgiveable curses on a well respected head of a pureblood house,” boomed a voice throughout the courtroom. “The inquisitors are Cornelius Oswald Fudge, Amelia Susan Bones, and Harry James Potter.”

With that Harry turned, as Umbridge sat in the chair, with shackles, looking at the courtroom in loathing.

“Vertitaserum has been administered to the accused, to verify the accuracy of her answers,” said Fudge, even though he regretted what might come out of Dolores’s mouth that might implicate him. It was

mostly assured by the end of this trial, he would be forced to resign as Minister of Magic.

“What was your real intention once you had taken the post of Hogwarts High Inquisitor?” asked Harry.

“To uncover evidence for the Minister of Magic, to make him believe that you were plotting against him, along with Dumbledore,” said Umbridge. “I regret to say that I failed to accomplish anything close to this.”

“What of Hermione Granger?” asked Bones. “How long did you know she had been practicing the dark arts?”

“I suspected so mere weeks into the year, but I verified it months later and managed to play on her paranoia to gather information on Potter, by promising to eliminate the Weasley girl so her path to Potter would be clear, I never intended to follow it up, once I had the information I needed, Granger would be sent to Azkaban,” said Umbridge, as a brief vindictive look appeared on her face. “She is a Mudblood, therefore she deserved to be used. I intended to use the High Inquisitor as a springboard to become Hogwarts Headmistress and then Minister of Magic, but Potter needed to be eliminated first.”

“You do not deny that you attempted to poison Miss Granger,” prompted Madam Bones.

“No I don’t deny that, she needed to be silenced, besides the world could go without one less Mudblood,” said Umbridge. “Cornelius gave me full permission to silence anyone who spoke out against the Ministry, including use of a highly restricted magical quill that forced the students who were given detention to write in their own blood.”

Fudge swallowed, he wanted this trial to end right now as several members of the court looked at him.

“So you do not deny that you attempted to use two Unforgiveable curses on me,” prompted Harry.

“I did and I would do it again if I had the chance,” said Umbridge.

"Are you or have you ever been a supporter of You-Know-Who?" asked Fudge who had feared the worst after what happened to Lucius but he had to be sure.

"No, I have never joined his ranks, I have sympathized with many of his options, but I find his willingness to align himself with filthy half breed such as werewolves to be disgusting," said Umbridge as the truth serum was unable. "I feel it would be best for the Ministry to allow him and his followers to cleanse the undesirables."

"I believe we have heard enough from the accused," responded Madam Bones. "Based on her crimes, we believe that a punishment no less than a Dementor's Kiss would be necessary. All those in favor of the punishment raise your hands."

Every member of the court raised their hand. Each and every one of them wanted to distance themselves from Umbridge as much as possible.

"All opposed," said Madam Bones but it was academic, all were in favor. The Aurors moved in to secure Umbridge to take her off to Azkaban before she was kissed.

"I might go down, but the Ministry will fall even harder, if Potter is not stopped before it's too late," answered Umbridge. "He's nothing but a disruptive child who needs to be punished."

With that Umbridge was silenced, by Fudge, so she could not make any more of a scene and so no more incriminating evidence against him fell out of her mouth. Fudge got to his feet, and walked from the courtroom, with the other members of the court following him. The Minister wondered if this day could get any worse and sure enough, Rufus Scrimgeour waited in the corridor.

"Minister, I don't know how it happened, but the Death Eaters that were captured during the Department of Mysteries battle, they've escaped Azkaban, the Dementors have fled the premises as well and can't be accounted for, they might have joined He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named," responded Scrimgeour grimly and Fudge paled at this.

"It's the end," said Fudge and it was hard to say whether he was talking about the Ministry of Magic with rogue Dementors on the loose or his career because of this latest scandal.

Harry stood back, as he heard the news. He hated it when he was right, Azkaban was unable to hold the prisoners and now the Dementors. They were on Voldemort's side, as it had been feared. He was glad he taught the D.A. how to do the Patronus Charm, but he wondered exactly how many would be successful against a real life Dementor. Neutralizing and perhaps eliminating the Dementors was near the top of Harry's list of things to do.

As for the Death Eaters, by the time he was done with them, he had a feeling they would have wished they would have stayed in Azkaban.

Ah, Chapter Twenty Eight is done. I went longer than I expected, so long that I had to cut some scenes out. A Bellatrix scene and a short Dumbledore scene were among the one's that have to be worked into the next chapter, as they are kind of important.

Hermione, what can I say about her? Is this the first step towards recovery or will it be a temporary calm before the storm leading to a more destructive Hermione breakdown than this previous one? Her parents are caught in the middle of this chaotic storm, with no way out thanks to the lovely laws on the books from the Ministry of Magic. I don't want to say too much about Hermione right now other than it's not as cut and dry as forgiving her or condemning her for her actions.

Umbridge, for all intents and purposes, she's done. Obviously with the Dementors missing in action, she won't be getting a kiss yet, but it's not likely she'll be busted out of Azkaban. Voldemort does have standards, you know. :)

I'm going to mention this right now, because I keep forgetting. There will never be any Animagus forms in my story. I have my reasons, mostly because they will serve little to no purpose about the plot I have in my head.

Next chapter, while it's not Voldemort and Harry showdown big, I think it will be rather eventful. In fact the next couple of chapters will set the main story arc for year six into place.

Chapter Twenty Nine: Uncovered:

Albus Dumbledore had put down the day's Daily Prophet. It appeared that Fudge had made one colossal blunder too many and people were calling for a forced retirement for the Minister of Magic. It was believed that the Minister would resign by the end of this month but Dumbledore doubted that he would be in a better position than he was politically. The two leading candidates were Amelia Bones and Rufus Scrimgeour, two individuals who were not likely to let Dumbledore back into his former status. That actually suited Dumbledore's plans nicely, he had a pivotal year planned for Harry, even though he had to modify his approach slightly due to his status of no longer being Headmaster. Still as long as Minerva remained Headmistress, he would be able to get into the school easily, without many people knowing, to give Harry the information that he required for Dumbledore to take his plan to the next level.

All of the information about Tom's life was secured. Dumbledore planned to release it piece by piece to Harry over the period of about a year, in a matter of speaking. He had located each and every one of the Horcruxes some years ago, but had not touched them as of yet. Dumbledore felt it would be for Harry's own good that he was not given this information. To properly grow into his role as Dumbledore's successor, there were still many storms Harry had to weather. The prophecy indicated that this would be a battle that Harry would need to face off against on his own.

The Resurrection Stone buried deep in the remains of the Gaunt Shack was something that grabbed Dumbledore's curiosity and had been a source of temptation. He wondered exactly how much Tom knew about the item he had made into a Horcrux or if he even believed the legend of the Death Hallows. It was highly possible that Voldemort had disregarded it as a mere fairy tale like others had before then. However, Dumbledore did extensive research, there were holes and contradictions in the history of the Hallows as there were any story. The Elder Wand was not as unbeatable as the legends would like people to believe, although it was a very powerful wand that could be a deadly tool in the wrong hands. Still if his plans went right, the Elder Wand would disappear into history, where no one else could ever use it again.

The Stone, Dumbledore would have, the Horcrux would be destroyed, and perhaps it would heighten Harry's curiosity. Harry would in turn do anything to obtain any information, especially if it was to defeat Voldemort. Dumbledore made plans to write to Minerva, to have her suggest to the Board of Governors to move Severus over to the position of the Defense Against the Dark Arts Teacher and then he would make a contact to his old friend, Horace Slughorn. Horace had been a rather illusive fellow as of late, but Dumbledore very nearly tracked him down. All it would be take is a few choice words, appealing to Slughorn's sense of greed. He just hoped that Minerva could convince the Board of Governors to go along with this idea, as they had not played along with what Dumbledore wished lately.

Still with all things considered, Dumbledore was pleased at where Harry was. His selfless act of helping Miss Granger, despite what she had done proved that Harry still had the proper mindset for the Wizarding World and the direction that Dumbledore wished that the Boy-Who-Lived led it in. Harry had passed the test that Dumbledore put in front of him with Outstanding marks, he had put to rest any doubts that he had about Harry. In fact, the former Hogwarts Headmaster would go as far to say that he trusted Harry one hundred percent with his life. Harry had proven himself to have qualities that were ideal for the direction that Dumbledore had lead the Wizarding World.

He would be the first admit he had made mistakes in the past, but Dumbledore was not mistaken about this. As he made plans for both the next year, he arranged for a trip to secure the Resurrection Stone from Grimmauld Place and the Horcrux within. It would be the first step to orchestrate Harry's inevitable defeat of Voldemort and time was of the essence.

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Daphne, Susan, Harry, and Ginny had returned from a prefect meeting. Draco Malfoy looked awfully smug that his father had escaped Azkaban. Harry doubted Draco would be too happy for much longer and he was amused at the thoughts that he caught in Draco's simple little mind. The arrogant little twat thought he would be

a valuable asset to Voldemort's cause. Perhaps for a shield, maybe, but Draco would be no more useful for Voldemort than the other Death Eaters. When it all boiled down to everything, they were all just warm bodies for whatever twisted, convoluted schemes Voldemort had in his mind. Once they arrived in the compartment with Neville and Luna, Harry decided to voice the news that he learned just before they left Hogwarts. First they placed all the necessary charms, before Harry decided to pour into the story.

"I received a very interesting letter just before I left, the Hogwarts Board of Governors wrote to me, saying McGonagall suggested Snape to be the new Defense Against the Dark Arts teacher just last evening," said Harry.

"Please tell me you're kidding!" exclaimed Neville in a slightly mortified voice. He had just managed to get through Potions thanks to Harry's help and had grown to understand the subject, but still Defense Against the Dark Arts was his favorite subject other than Herbology. He hated to see Snape taint it, even though Umbridge did this year, but that was by design, to get the D.A. kick started.

"I don't think he's kidding," responded Luna calmly.

"Can't we just bring Lockhart back?" asked Ginny but Harry just grabbed her hand for support.

"Last I heard his mind pretty much is a mess, he's more or less brain dead," responded Susan.

"And that will be a difference, how?" asked Daphne which caused the group to laugh. "Harry, I personally think it really doesn't matter whether or not Snape is in or not. I mean, we have the D.A. still."

"I agree with Daphne, any Defense Against the Dark Arts class isn't going to be as nearly important," added Susan.

"Besides there's the curse that's supposed to be on the position," suggested Luna casually. "It would be a shame if Professor Snape had a little accident when he was the Defense Against the Dark Arts

teacher. I think it would break up the entire student body, I don't think we would be able to bare it."

"Ah yes the curse that everyone says is on the position, that is on the position because Voldemort did curse it, by using some rather advanced dark magic when Dumbledore refused the job," responded Harry as he looked with a slight smirk as he looked around to the group. "I could kill two birds with one stone, it's so simple. Snape won't dare do anything because he's still on probation and he needs to remain at Hogwarts to appease both of his masters. Therefore if he learns of the D.A., all he can do is just grit his teeth and scowl nastily, something we can all agree he's had ample practice in doing."

"Not that he can do anything to begin with because the group is technically legal, even though it's not something that is out in the open," added Ginny.

"And if the curse does work its insidious magic as intended, I think we might be saying good bye to Professor Snape forever," said Harry as he brushed away a fake tear. "I better purchase flowers."

"That's a bit cruel Harry," said Daphne seriously before she brightened up. "You should have really been in Slytherin you know, you would have done better than some of the nitwits populating the house."

She turned her head to give a cough that sounded vaguely like Malfoy, before she turned her head as if nothing happened.

"It's going to be sad though, no D.A. this summer," answered Luna. "I just hope everyone who is able to will get a chance to practice what they know, but not on real life Death Eaters."

"Agreed that's a fate I don't wish on anyone," replied Harry.

"With Fudge gone, I think it's safe to say that the Ministry might take everything a bit more seriously," said Neville and Harry did hope that Neville was right, but he had little faith in the Ministry over all. Certain people who worked there, yes, he believed they might be able to make a difference, but as a collective, he doubted the Ministry would be

able to contain a room of five year olds on a sugar high, much less a small army of dangerous dark witches and wizards.

“Well it will either be Aunt Amelia or Rufus Scrimgeour,” said Susan as she looked a bit worried at the prospect of her Aunt Amelia being a more high profile target than ever before.

“Scrimgeour, he’s too by the book to be any good for progression in the Ministry,” said Ginny.

“I know Susan, you’re worried about your aunt being a target, but steps are being taken to make sure she remains as safe as she’s ever going to be,” said Harry who as he weighed his options, Amelia Bones getting into the spot of Minister of Magic was best for where he wanted to go. Scrimgeour was a distant second and then there were some absolute putrid options that might be even worse than Umbridge going on down that were in high ranking positions of power. “I have a friend who is keeping an eye on her. Let’s just say she blends in really well.”

“You seem rather confident that she’ll get into the Minister of Magic spot,” observed Luna.

“I never plan for something that’s not going to happen,” answered Harry.

“I appreciate it Harry, but you really shouldn’t have to go to all of that trouble, I might be worried, but Aunt Amelia can take care of herself and I think whatever people you have working for you would be better off doing something else than watching her,” answered Susan, even though she was really grateful what Harry and Ginny were both doing, she also realized that there was a much bigger picture at state then the welfare and health of her aunt.

“We realize that she can take care of herself, but that might be a problem,” said Ginny.

“Ginny has a point, as much as I hate to say this, this won’t be a job that Voldemort will entrust his little servants to do on their own, he’s going to take a more hands on approach,” said Harry darkly and

Susan's eyes widened at this. "In the Ministry, its unlikely Voldemort would risk showing his face..."

"But after hours, when she's at home, I can see where you're going Harry," said Susan as while her aunt was an above average witch, against Voldemort, she had little to no chance. In fact, there was only one person who could be able to match Voldemort spell for spell in a duel and that person was sitting right across from her.

They spent the rest of the train ride making some light non-Voldemort related conversation but it eventually got to a subject that Harry was a bit apprehensive in explaining.

"Now Harry, we didn't have time in the D.A. meeting but the Granger situation, the fact that you're actually forgiving her for what she did, I guess that's your business but I just wonder if it's such a good idea," said Daphne but she stopped. "Unless of course you aren't really forgiving her..."

"I am, but at the same time, I'm not," responded Harry cryptically. "Let's just put in this way, the Hermione I knew before that Goblet of Fire deal when down, she might still be alive for all I know, but this person that we have been dealing with, was nasty, vindictive, and quite dangerous. Not by design, but unfortunately by a series of bad choices that had nearly destroyed her mind."

"She had Dark Arts Dependency," answered Ginny.

"A very early stage I take it," prompted Luna and Harry nodded. "Fair enough you're both giving her another chance and being smart about it."

"My intentions aren't completely noble, but if Hermione does manage to get better from these potions, than it's an unexpected bonus to this grand plan," said Harry. "Ginny and I both agree that it's possible, but not something we're hanging are hopes on."

"Just wait and see in other words," said Neville.

"Precisely," answered Harry. "The moment we get a hint of her regressing back into how she was all year, we'll contain her and...well I don't think any of you have ever had to put down a rabid animal before that was once close to you, like a pet."

The group shook their heads.

"Neither have I but I think it's safe to say that it would not be fun at all, you want to remember all the good times, but you then realize its for its own good, its sick and a danger to both itself and others," concluded Harry. "A human being, well that would be much worse, especially when she was once considered to be about as close as a sister. There is a high likelihood that she will get better and we won't have to cross this bridge but there is also a chance that..."

"You'll do what's necessary no matter what happens," interjected Ginny in a confident voice as she moved close to Harry, wrapping her arms around Harry, turning so he could look into her eyes.

"Most people would take the easy way out, whatever that is any more," concluded Harry as he heard the train move to a stop as he looked at them seriously. "You all try and have the best summer you can with what's waiting out there, if you need to contact me or each other, do it through the usual secure methods, owls won't work where I'm staying anyway and until Voldemort's six feet under, owls aren't really going to work too well."

They all nodded, saying good bye to each other, before Luna, Daphne, Susan, and Neville all went their separate ways leaving Harry and Ginny alone, as they enveloped each other in an embrace before their lips met in a kiss. They never wanted this to end but it was unfortunate as Molly Weasley had just arrived on the platform, looking a bit tired and weary. Arthur's death had did a number on her. Ron, Fred, and George made their way over and Ginny reluctantly pulled apart from Harry.

"I'll see you tonight Ginny," said Harry as they broke apart.

"Won't be soon enough for me," responded Ginny as they both laughed before they exchanged one more quick kiss, before Harry

walked off. He had precious little time to waste, he needed to get the information on the vault out of Bellatrix and he hoped his latest inspiration on how to get the information out of her would do the trick.

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“Potter,” said Bellatrix coldly as Harry had entered the room where she was secured. “Still see you haven’t given up on trying to get me to tell you the vault number where the cup is being held.”

“No, I’m not and let me make one thing perfectly clear, I don’t like you and you like me even less,” responded Harry crisply as he looked at Bellatrix with an emotionless look on his face. Her past had garnered some sympathy, until it was realized all of the rotten things Bellatrix did in the name of Voldemort. “But let me make one thing perfectly clear, I’m not going to pretend to be your friend or play games. I might have been able to pity you at one time, but there are some things you’ve done that can never be excused no matter what.”

“Yes Potter, do go on, I hear the screams of my victims at night in my dreams and it turns me on quite frankly, to see human suffering,” said Bellatrix coldly. “I don’t feel any remorse for what I did, my father never felt any remorse for all of the great times we shared together so why should I be any different. Sirius never felt any remorse when he shunned me and left me to rot in Azkaban. And your mother Potter, let’s not get started on her. Lily Evans played the vision of perfection, a pure princess of the light side, but there was a much darker side to her, she used people to get what she wanted and discarded them. Kind of like you Potter, but I suppose I can’t blame you too much, Fudge and Umbridge are two people that even I’m sickened by and it takes a lot to sicken me. Still your mother, she was like a leech...”

“You make one more remark about my mother, Lestrangle, and I’ll send you back to Voldemort in pieces,” said Harry dangerously.

“I don’t doubt you will do so anyway in the end, Potter, perhaps yes,” said Bellatrix in a calm voice, that was almost too calm and put Harry on edge and he was ready for her to do something desperate. Even if she was secured, Bellatrix Lestrangle was a dangerous and mentally unstable woman beyond all help. “Mummy wasn’t as perfect as you

would have liked to believe, she strung Snape along for five years, learning as much about the dark arts she could before she ripped out his heart and stomped on it. Isn't that nice, Potter?"

"It's no less than Snape deserved," answered Harry coldly, he knew what Snape was capable of though his Voldemort obtained memories.

"I'm feeling a draft in here, Potter, you're cold," responded Bellatrix eyes widened but then she gave him a twisted grin.

"The vault number Lestrage," said Harry.

"No Potter!" sang Bellatrix as she looked at Potter expecting frustration but he was just smiling before he reached into the pocket of his robe.

"I didn't want to resort to this but you forced my hand, Bellatrix," responded Harry in a mock regretful voice. "What would you say if I have a way to remove that dark mark from your forearm?"

"NO!" shrieked Bellatrix fearfully, she could not bare to lose her dark mark, it connected her with the Dark Lord, the only person who ever looked out for her best interest. "STAY WAY FROM MY FOREARM YOU HALF BLOODED PIECE OF TRASH!"

"Yes, I can do that, Bellatrix, I have within my pocket the cure that fortunate blemish upon your right forearm," said Harry as he removed a bottle of a bubbling green substance from his pocket. "See this little potion will remove any unsightly blemishes, including tattoos burned in your skin by megalomaniac dark lords. Sure it might burn right through the bone as well, but it's the thought that counts. This little miracle cure can be avoided with one easy payment, that's one easy payment of telling me what number is vault the cup of Helga Hufflepuff."

Harry held the bottle over Bellatrix who swallowed. There was no way Potter was bluffing, the look in his eyes suggestion absolutely no deception.

"Alright vault eight four!" shouted Bellatrix

"Are you certain?" asked Harry.

"Yes, I swear to the Dark Lord I'm not lying!" cried Bellatrix, as she did not want to lose her dark mark, that would be the greatest insult. "Keep that vial away from me you sick, sadistic, half blooded bastard!"

"Ah, afraid of a little water mixed with food coloring I see," responded Harry and Bellatrix gashed her teeth together when she realized that Potter had found a way to trick her. "I have urgent business to attend to right now but you will be reunited with your precious master all too soon."

"Just wait Potter, I'll kill you and everyone else that you love!" shouted Bellatrix in a crazed voice but Harry paid her no mind, as she was completely secured. Besides he had heard that song and dance in the past and will hear in the future. It was a tactic that psychopaths used to get in the head of their victims, even though they were very capable of carrying out their threats. Still he had no intention of Bellatrix leaving this room with the ability to kill a fly, much less a human being.

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"Are you sure this will work, Harry?" asked Tonks the next day, as Harry and Ginny were following her at a safe distance under the Invisibility Cloak as they approached . As far as Mrs. Weasley knew, Ginny was upstairs studying and doing her homework. Right now Tonks looked exactly like her aunt, Bellatrix Lestrange, thanks to her abilities.

"I wouldn't be doing it if I wasn't sure," replied Harry calmly, as he held the bag on his shoulder, containing their secret weapons against the goblins just in case they found out. He thought using Tonks to pose as Bellatrix was one of his better ideas. After all, why waste perfectly good time, money, and potions ingredients to make Polyjuice Potion when there is a Metamorphmagus on the payroll? One of Dumbledore's great blunders was not taking advantage of her talents when he had the opportunity. She could be the perfect spy or

decoy with the ability to change her features. The fact that Dumbledore squandered her abilities by placing her under an Invisibility Cloak to guard a Prophecy, was just rather sad.

“Besides yes there is a chance that the goblins will find us out, but we’ve got it taken care of,” answered Ginny firmly from underneath the cloak. “You know the things we just purchased before we got here.”

“Those water guns, you expect those to beat the goblins?” asked Tonks in surprise.

“Yes, we do, Nymphadora,” replied Harry calmly. “For almost a year, I have learned about everything I’ve could about the security of Gringotts, the measures they take against thieves. I hope to use their defenses against them. It wasn’t until now that I had the information that I needed to go in and get the cup.”

“If you say so Harry, hopefully this will go off without a hitch,” said Tonks.

“Considering how suspicious the goblins can get, we need to be ready for anything they throw at us, to fight at a moment’s notice,” said Ginny.

“And we will be, goblins are among the fiercest warriors in the world, but much like the humans they show disdain for, they still don’t plan for every possible angle that they can be attacked with, even the completely absurd,” answered Harry. “Of course no one expected anyone to think of the completely obvious solution of summoning the egg in the first task in the Triwizard Tournament.”

“Just remember Tonks, try and act as much like her as possible,” added Ginny.

“In other words, be nasty, rude, and threaten the goblins with great bodily harm if they don’t do what you say,” said Harry firmly. “They are beneath you, they are filthy half breeds to you, that are not fit to breath the same air. You are pureblood, they should be falling at your feet, kissing the very ground you walk on.”

"I get it Harry," said Tonks as they entered the bank, which thankfully was not that crowded. Hogwarts had only been out less than a day and Diagon Alley was barely populated. She walked over to a goblin at a desk who looked rather bored.

"May I help you, human?" asked the goblin in a snide voice.

"Listen here you filthy creature, I need you to take me to my vault, number eight four and make it snappy!" shrieked Tonks, doing a very accurate impression of her aunt as the goblin looked up, as his eyes widened and it was very amusing to see a goblin show some signs of fear.

"Madam Lestrage, of course, of course, this way, please don't hurt me, I'll lead you right to it, I trust that you have your key," stated the goblin.

"No, once I was thrown into Azkaban, the Ministry confiscated my home and everything in it, including the key!" snapped Tonks, as she lifted her wand threateningly. "I trust this will not be a problem, as I am a respected pureblood and deserve your respect."

"No, we will require a drop of your blood when you get down here, to make a new key," said the goblin.

"Good thing Tonks is related to her, it might be enough to trick the goblins," muttered Ginny.

"Let's hope so," whispered Harry, who doubted the goblins would be fooled for much longer, they would need to make their move. So far, so good, as they were lead into a cart. Harry and Ginny carefully climbed in, with Tonks and the goblin in as the cart moved down a winding path, towards the level where Bellatrix's vault were but they were met with a group of about two dozen goblins, each wielding spears, wearing both armor and nasty expressions on their faces as well. The cart stopped as the goblin who maneuvered it stopped it.

"Is their a problem, Karak?" asked the goblin to what appeared to be the leader of the goblin warriors.

"This human is an imposter, our sensors picked up an attempted deception," said Karak nastily, as he looked in the cart. "And there are others in that cart, under an Invisibility Cloak."

"Time to go," muttered Harry as he threw the cloak off, before he and Ginny blasted the goblin in the cart over the side and quickly Harry activated the lever to propel it down the pathway, mowing over several goblins.

"How did they know?" asked Ginny.

"They're goblins, they have their ways, but don't worry, everything is going to plan," responded Harry in a reassuring voice.

"I hate to see how bad things are if everything was going badly," said Tonks but Harry looked at the lever with a frown.

"Those lying goblins, there is more than one speed on this thing," responded Harry and he activated the lever, causing it to propel itself faster but there were several carts on their tail.

"Activate defenses, don't let those thieves get away!" shouted a voice and jagged rocks erupted out of the ground.

"TIME TO BAIL!" shouted Harry and they leapt out of the cart, before rocks erupted underneath it, shattering it to pieces. Harry stuffed the Invisibility Cloak back into the bag, the hoods of their robes were pulled over his and Ginny's faces, obscuring their identity, the magically voice distorters in the hood activated.

"They're concealed, activate the thief's downfall!" shouted another voice as a blast of water appeared from the ceiling but rather Harry and Ginny removed the water guns from Harry's bag, before they siphoned the water into them and passed one to Tonks.

"Aim for the armor, it's magically enchanted and this water from the thief's downfall, it melts away any enchantments and concealments," explained Harry without taking a breath and they aimed the water guns at the goblins who stopped, before they laughed at the humans

threatening them with mere Muggle toys. The humans had the last laugh as magically altered water of the thief's downfall splashed the armor, causing it to crumble apart. The goblins were quickly bombarded with as many spells as possible, several of them dropping to the ground or getting blasted back. Others remained standing but they backed off.

"Release the dragons!" cried one of the goblins which caused Harry to just smile.

"Everyone relax, stay calm, its just an overgrown fire breathing lizard that will become angry when its hit in the eyes with three consecutive Conjunctivitis Curses," stated Harry as they saw a shadow of a dragon that could just barely fit through the tunnel but that just made the beast even more nasty and foul tempered. Several more appeared to be in the distance, but judging by the vault numbers, they were rather quick. "Ready set go!"

Three Conjunctivitis Curses struck the dragon in the eyes, causing him to go insane. Harry, Ginny, and Tonks quickly slipped down the side, before they made their way to vault eight four.

"No key hole?" asked Tonks.

"Figures, that could have been why we got found out," said Ginny. "It might be difficult to get in without a key."

"A minor inconvenience," responded Harry.

"How could you be so calm about this?" asked Tonks as she heard dragons approaching.

"Practice," said Harry as he looked towards the vault door. He remembered what he was told years ago, that anyone but a Gringotts goblin would be sucked inside if they tried to touch the door of a high security vault. Exactly what Harry needed for easy access. "Okay, hang on, but I do warn you, this might cause slight discomfort."

Ginny and Tonks did as they were told as Harry touched the door and sure enough, they, along with everything on them were sucked inside

the vault. They crashed to the ground of the vault, surrounded with piles of gold galleons, along with many artifacts that Harry suspected would be rather dark and dangerous. Then on a shelf was the Hufflepuff Cup. Ginny made a movement to go over, but Harry grabbed her hand.

“Don’t touch anything, Gemino and Flagrante Charms are on this vault and likely have been activated, anything will multiply and burn when touched directly until it’s out of the vault,” responded Harry.

“Then just summon it then?” asked Ginny but Harry responded by shaking his head.

“Won’t work, all objects in Gringotts have been charmed against summoning, proving that goblins are one step above the organizers of the Triwizard Tournament, levitation as well,” responded Harry as he reached into his bag, before he pulled out an ordinary magnet. “But, naturally there are ways around any charm, if I magically alter the properties of this magnet just enough, it should be able to grab onto Hufflepuff’s Cup easily. Just a few minor adjustments and we have our cup.”

The cup was pulled off of the shelf and stuck onto Harry’s magnet. He was careful not to touch the cup with his hand, before he removed an exact duplicate, minus the Horcrux, from his bag and levitated it in the exact place where the original Hufflepuff Cup was stolen. Harry then carefully placed the Hufflepuff Cup along with the magnet. Then he pulled back his sleeve to reveal his wrist Portkey.

“Goblins have some pretty sophisticated anti-Portkey wards, but they are mostly for keeping people from out, not in, a small adjustment to my Portkey, and we should be able to weave around the wards with no problem, except for a small case of nausea and perhaps a slight ringing sensation in our ears,” stated Harry as he tapped his wand and made a temporary alteration, before he placed his bag over his arm, containing the Hufflepuff Cup and his Invisibility Cloak. “Okay, everyone grab on, I don’t know how long this Portkey can stay intact without going apart.”

Sure enough, Ginny and Tonks grabbed an arm each, as they were pulled through a very distorted hole in time and space. The journey was rather rocky and shaky, but at least they came out in one piece, behind Fred and George's new shop in Diagon Alley. They dropped to the ground as Tonks nearly clapped in dizziness.

"We did it Harry!" shouted Ginny happily as they pulled their hoods down before they exchanged a very long kiss, with Harry nearly lifting Ginny off of the ground in triumph, but they were pressed tightly towards each other. It took them a moment to realize that Tonks was still on the ground, dizzy, vomiting at the trip she went through.

"Okay Tonks?" asked Harry.

"I'll be fine, that wasn't a pleasant way to get out of that mess," said Tonks as she shook her head and pulled herself to a standing position.

"That worked out well, don't you say?" asked Ginny.

"Yes, exactly as I had planned," said Harry as he had the bag with the Hufflepuff Cup inside. "Fred and George had some things they were working on for me, that I need to take a look at before we go and destroy the cup."

"I'll just be going home to lie down if that's alright with you Harry," said Tonks and Harry nodded his head, dismissing Tonks.

"Thanks for the help, you deserve the rest of the day off," responded Harry, as Tonks disappeared before Harry turned to Ginny, and they moved towards the back entrance of the shop. Harry raised his hand and knocked three times.

"Password," said a voice from behind the door of the back entrance.

"Open this door, you twin nitwits," answered Harry.

"That's right, come on in Harry," said George as he opened the door to allow Harry and Ginny to walk inside, as Fred was also in the back

room in the shop. "And Ginny as well, I was under the impression that you were upstairs studying."

"Well that was the idea," responded Ginny.

"True, it's nice our little sister hasn't been lost to us forever when she became a prefect," answered Fred.

"Guys, I'm a prefect too," said Harry.

"Yes, we know, but you'd kick our arses if we made fun of you," responded George with a shudder.

"Too true," stated Fred.

"And Ginny wouldn't?" asked Harry as Ginny stood in the back with a sweet smile, but she held her wand firmly.

"The man's got a point," said George.

"Indeed he does, George," replied Fred. "So what can we do for our favorite investor?"

"I understand you gentlemen have some items to show me, that would be of great interest to my efforts against Voldemort," answered Harry.

"Quite right Harry, a few Ministry warnings about Inferi might be used by Mr. Riddle caused us to develop these little things," said George.

"Nasty creatures, well they would have to be, walking corpses and all of that," answered Fred. "Well, we managed to take the basic concept of dung bombs, to create a new weapon to use on these foul things."

"Yeah, as hard as it might be to believe, we do read every now and again, and these things have a strong fear of fire," answered George. "So we were thinking, we could modify dung bombs, causing them to burst into large blasts of fire, instead of the charming smell they release normally."

"Took us a couple of tries and several misfires, but we have our newest creation, the Incendio Bomb, which can wipe out several Inferi in one throw," continued Fred.

"They could also be rather dangerous to use, especially in the wrong hands, so it's obvious why we are not going to put them with the regular stock," answered George. "A few of these things could burn down a house the size of the Great Hall."

"Intriguing," responded Harry as he eyed the Incendio Bombs.

"We also made some modifications to the robes, a shield that manifests itself around you, obviously with any other shield it could be blown through with enough powerful attacks," responded George.

"Also, repels all physical attacks, even the ballots from those firelegs," added Fred.

"I believe the term you are looking for is bullets from firearms," responded Harry, who was intrigued nevertheless and Fred and George responded with nods.

"And we also took your idea on Muggle poison darts and have adapted them to be able to be used hand in hand with magical poisons, took some tweaking, along with several charms, but the final result is more than acceptable," said George. "These things can hold enough poison to put a full grown mountain troll down for a long nap."

"What are these?" asked Ginny curiously as she lifted up a pair of silvery gloves.

"A reject project I'm afraid, something they we developed to help deal with the giants, to amplify the magic to bring them down," said Fred sadly. "They would also work well against Dementors for someone who could barely manage a Patronus, but I think we learned a harsh lesson of why a shortcut like this hasn't really been invented before."

"Yeah, the gloves kept backfiring on us and blasting them back into the wall," said George. "The last time we tried, I couldn't sit for a week, they're no good."

“Well not everything is going to be as successfully as intended,” said Harry but privately he wondered if there was something that the twins had missed in their attempts. It would be something for consideration for later.

“I’m afraid that is the best of what we’ve got to show you, we’re making some progress a few of your other projects, but no where near completed,” said George.

“On the bright side, we are making a killing through all of the prank items, they seem to be very popular sellers,” answered Fred. “We have made back almost triple of what you gave us for our start up fees.”

“I’m glad to see that and don’t even try to give me one knut of that money,” warned Harry. “You earned it through your hard work and determination, I just gave you the start up capital.”

“Still do take anything you want, especially in the back room, but anything in the shop is rather fair game,” said George.

“Given your innovation nature, you might find a more serious use for even the prank items we have,” added Fred.

“I’ll have to take you up on that offer late, but right now we have to get back, duty calls,” said Harry cryptically.

“Right, we’ll leave you to your...work,” said George but Harry and Ginny were already gone in the blink of an eye.

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Rita Skeeter waited at a back table of the Leaky Cauldron, impatiently. The big news of the day was Fudge’s resignation as Minister of Magic. Right now, there was no Minister but that fact would of course change within the next few weeks. It looked to be down to either Amelia Bones or Rufus Scrimgeour as the brand new Minister. Rita made a mental note to dig up some dirt on both potential candidates, because that’s what sold papers. The recent Gringotts breakout was mildly

amusing, but since nothing had been stolen it was of little interest to the readers of the Prophet.

Right now, Rita tapped her fingers on the table impatiently. She had a meeting with Harry Potter, who had been the subject of some of her most memorable stories. The more she continued to write about Potter, in a favorable light, the more comfortable she was able to live. Rita in fact suspected that Potter had some stake in the ownership of the Daily Prophet, but she could uncover nothing that would prove her theory. However, right now, Potter hinted that he had information that could lead to Rita uncovering the story of the century. With Fudge's recent exit of the Ministry of Magic, she doubted that anything that Potter said could eclipse that. However, Rita was not going to be for sure until she asked.

"Good afternoon, Rita," answered Harry as he sat down right across from her, with two hooded figures on either side of him, each holding wands.

"Harry, how delightful, it's been too long," answered Rita cheerfully. "I wonder, it's been too long, how about an exclusive interview with the Boy-Who-Lived..."

"As many papers as my scar sells, this little story will sell much more," answered Harry as he dropped a folder right in front of Rita as he placed Anti-Eavesdropping spells all around them. "Information about Lord Voldemort, that proves that he is a half blood wizard, not the pureblood he portrays himself in. Concrete evidence, enough to write perhaps the greatest story in your career, to expose Voldemort for what he truly is."

"And the last," muttered Rita, who was conflicted. On one hand, she enjoyed puncturing overinflated reputations and there was none that was more overinflated than He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named. On the other hand, she could measure her remaining life in minutes, as the moment he saw what she had written, there would be Death Eaters at her front step.

"Now come on Rita, where is your journalistic spirit, it's an important story that the people have the right to know, especially the masses of

purebloods who follow Voldemort blindly because they think he's one of them," answered Harry. "But if you're not interested, I'm sure I'm going to have to withhold that five thousand galleon payment for writing the story and give it to some other journalist."

"Wait a minute, Harry, I didn't say no," responded Rita who smirked in triumph. Five thousand galleons would be enough of her to flee the country and live someone else under an assumed name. She would still get the fame of exposing He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named to the word.

"Have the story in the Daily Prophet within a week and the gold is yours," responded Harry, before he dropped his voice to a whisper. "And my name can't be tied to where you have gotten the information in any way."

"Right Harry, I understand, you have a deal," said Rita as she took the information with greed. This would make her famous the world over. This would be the greatest story of her career and the money she would get to write it would allow her to retire in luxury.

"Excellent I knew you would see it my way," answered Harry as Rita watched him and his two hooded companions move off.

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Days later, the headline of the Daily Prophet read the following.

Special Report: The Hidden Secrets of Lord Voldemort Revealed

By Rita Skeeter, Special Correspondent.

The article went on to give a great deal of information on Voldemort's past and heritage. Needless to say the aftershocks were felt throughout the Wizarding World and one Dark Lord was none too happy with the article that he was reading. He knew exactly who had spilled the information as well, Potter would pay.

And that's the end of Chapter Twenty Nine. Chapter Thirty will be a big one. All I'm going to say it'll suck to be a Death Eater in the not so distant future.

Also, I did not forget to mention what happened to Bellatrix. It is being left open for reasons that will be made clear later. Everything will be revealed in due time.

Until next time.

Chapter Thirty: Downfall:

Hermione sat in her room, rather tired as she looked up at the ceiling in a distant manner. It was almost like she lived the last year and a half in a hazy fog. She remembered very few details of everything that happened, although she remembered bits and pieces of what happened. She vaguely remembered talking to Dumbledore about trying to find a loophole to get Harry out of the Triwizard Tournament. Then, the next she knew, her and Harry were not speaking to each other, Ginny was with him, and she had lost two friends before she knew it. She barely remembered other things she did, things that she were not proud of but her memories made little sense. It was almost like an entirely different person had taken control of her body.

One thing she remembered clearly was studying the dark arts. Every painful detail of studying them, how she nearly ruined her life, the black outs, the bouts of nausea, the need to mutilate small animals just to make the pain go away, as a release for the pain she suffered. Voices telling her to kill people, she wanted them to go away. The curse backfiring on her, when she tried to kill Ginny, had seemed to bring everything back to reality. The disappointment on Harry's face, the disgust, at how she came close to killing the girl he loved. She could never be there for Harry like Ginny was, she was jealous and resented that fact. They knew it. Those voices, playing on the hatred, the agony that Ginny was with Harry and not Hermione. Why would it matter? She ruined her own future because of what she did. One act of weakness, the love potion, when she thought she knew better but no matter how many books she read, Hermione came to the sad conclusion that she knew nothing. Her life was a sham, not even full of meaning, her love for authority figures, her respect in them, crumbled into dust, because of Dumbledore, because of Fudge, because of Umbridge, everything was corrupt. Books were useless, they never offered her any help and she was the most hated witch in all of Hogwarts. Harry and Ginny were her only real friends and this is what she did to them? They might help her try and get over this Dark Arts Dependency problem but they had no obligation to help her. If they hated Hermione, quite frankly, she could not blame them at all.

Then there were her parents. Hermione felt distant, almost like there was a glass wall that she could not penetrate, no matter what, they

were separate from her. She did not identify with them at all anymore, they were Muggles, she was a witch, it was two separate worlds. Yet, she loved them, at least she thought she did. Should that even be a question? Hermione wondered what happened with her life. It was almost like she just barely had a grip on her sanity. The potion would help but for how long. Surely she could not keep this up for the rest of her life. Perhaps it would be best to just end it now, to stop people like Harry and Ginny from suffering. Next time she fell, someone else could get hurt.

She shook her head. Hermione vowed not to take the easy way out, she was sorted into Gryffindor for a reason. She had to be brave, she had to be strong, but she wished there was some way that she could help Harry and Ginny. They would be both in the middle of this Voldemort mess. Realistically, in a duel, Hermione knew she would lose badly. She was bad at thinking on her feet. Memorizing spells out of a book, no problem at all. However, actually one on one with a Death Eater and she would not last.

Hermione leaned over, she threw the note that stated Harry arranged to have some Aurors escort her to take her for the O.W.L. make-up date. She appreciated Harry going to all the trouble, it was far more than she deserved, but at least it meant she would not have to retake an entire year over again. Under the note was the latest copy of the Daily Prophet, the headline about Voldemort catching her interest straight away.

Special Report: The Hidden Secrets of Lord Voldemort Revealed

By Rita Skeeter, Special Correspondent.

Against the better wishes of my editor, I have written the name of Lord Voldemort, known to most as He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named or You-Know-Who. The truth of the matter is after his return a few months ago, Voldemort is a subject of great interest to the Wizarding community. Little is known about the past of perhaps one of the most dangerous dark wizards to ever operate in this country. Voldemort, known Tom Marvolo Riddle(which can be rearranged to spell "I Am Lord Voldemort"), was born to Merope Gaunt and Tom Riddle. The Gaunts have a storied and shady history. They were descended from

noble blood, straight from Salazar Slytherin himself, but they took maintaining blood purity to a brand new level. Marriages between cousins and in some extreme cases, brothers and sisters, were arranged. Inbreeding occurred over the centuries, as the Gaunts became more and more insane. Eventually the family fortune was squandered and by the time the story of Voldemort begins, they were reduced to less than nothing.

Marvolo Gaunt was an embittered man who lived in a hovel with his two children, Morfin and Merope, off to a side of a Muggle village called Little Hangleton. His family lived in disease and filth, the same filth that the future Dark Lord would be conceived out of. Merope was considered to be a squib, nothing more and Morfin was a deranged lunatic who talked to dead snakes nailed to the door. Not the picture of the ideal family life, as Merope was abused and belittled by Marvolo and Morfin. Given the history of incest in this family, some very disturbing conclusions can be drawn between the relationship between Marvolo and his daughter. This life went on until one day, Tom Riddle, a Muggle, was attacked by Morfin. As it turns out, Merope was infatuated with the young Riddle and Morfin took offense to this. I will allow you the readers to draw your own conclusions, but the facts are after a scuffle involving Ministry officials, Morfin and Marvolo were hauled off to Azkaban. Merope was alone but not for long.

Merope Gaunt, I should note, was not exactly the ideal beauty that would attract the eye of a young rich man like Tom Riddle. Yet, before long, Riddle, a Muggle I might remind you, ran off with Merope. The people I have interviewed that are still alive recall that it was quite the scandal at the time and they suspected blackmail. Little did they know it was much sinister, as there is evidence that Merope may have used a love potion on Riddle to coerce him into having relations with her. After a time, she stopped administering it and Riddle fled, just months before she was to give birth to the future Lord Voldemort. You read that correctly, contrary to popular belief, Lord Voldemort was not the product of two pureblood nobles. Rather he was the result of a love potion induced rape between an inbred squib and a Muggle with no known magical ancestry.

The point right now is that Tom Marvolo Riddle alias Lord Voldemort is far from the pureblood crusader he portrays himself to be. He is just by the most technical definitions a half blood wizard and one conceived from rather dubious circumstances. The true fanatics will believe what they wish to believe, no matter how many facts I give you, but the birth certificate copy on the next page speaks for itself, along with the official Auror reports from the late 1920s detailing the incidents involving Morfin Gaunt and Tom Riddle. A family tree dating back to the days of Salazar Slytherin for Voldemort is also there, you should of course note the distinct lack of forking.

For one this reporter hopes that some purebloods wake up and see exactly who they are submitting themselves to. If nothing else, the next time you kiss your master's feet, you should check to see how many toes he has.

Hermione wondered exactly how many facts were true and exactly how much was fabricated by Skeeter. Granted, she had known that Voldemort was a half blood, after the Chamber of Secrets. She flipped through the paper, the birth certificate and the police report was there, along with the Gaunt family tree, everything was there. Perhaps there would be a few that would have second thoughts about joining up with Voldemort, but as Rita had pointed out, the fanatics would believe what they want to believe. That was the nature of fanatics after all.

She calmly flipped through the rest of the Daily Prophet, just the usual pureblood inspired tripe and a few pieces of news, based on deaths. It did not really take a rocket scientist to figure out that Voldemort or his Death Eaters were behind any of the mentioned incidents. Hermione read through the paper, scanning the stories page by page, when she stopped at a small paragraph. A paragraph that just barely filled up a quarter of a page. It almost appeared like it was just shoved into the Prophet as an after thought, to fill up space that was left over in the paper.

Hermione's hands shook when she read the paper. It briefly detailed the murder of fifty Muggle children in an Orphanage when it was torched to the ground. The fire was said to be started magically, but it was just there almost as a curiosity. Hermione clutched the paper in

her hands, she realized now that throwing these Death Eaters into Azkaban would not solve anything. They had broken out twice now.

“Those bastards,” hissed Hermione angrily, they targeting Muggle children to serve no true agenda. It was just for sport, just to prove that they can. She knew the Death Eaters had done vile things in the past but this had crossed a brand new disgusting line. She threw the paper against the wall angrily. The Ministry, no matter who got in, would not do anything. Dumbledore would not do anything. Harry had his own problems with Voldemort himself, to worry too much about the actions of certain Death Eaters.

Hermione felt sleepy, the potion she had to take had begun to kick in and she always took it after dinner as recommended, as it would cause drowsiness. As she drifted off to sleep, Hermione envisioned swift justice being brought down upon the Death Eaters, more than the Ministry or Dumbledore had ever tried.

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Dumbledore dropped down carefully, right outside the Gaunt house in the latter part of the evening. It was after dark, so no Muggles passing by would notice, although he heard the rumors of the many mysterious deaths that occurred around the area. Dumbledore carefully walked up to the front door. A tap of his wand and the door swung open, to allow him entrance. The floor boards creaked as he walked in. The walls were cracked. The house had just barely stood up. Other than a table and a few chairs, there was nothing inside it.

“The Horcrux should be right around here,” muttered Dumbledore to himself as he took more steps. There was a loosened floorboard that Dumbledore levitated down. Deep below the house sat very familiar ring. It had a sinister air to it. Carefully the floorboards were moved back one by one, something that had to be done carefully. The house looked like it could cave in at any moment and even magic would not be enough to hold it up. After a bit of careful work, Dumbledore created a large enough area where he could drop down to retrieve the Horcrux. After a cushioning spell was placed on the ground, Dumbledore made the drop. He reached forward, the Horcrux, the fabled Resurrection Stone, was sitting there right before him.

Dumbledore stepped forward, there appeared to be no protections around it that he could pick up. "Smart to place it here Tom, no one would dare look in this abandoned hovel, but that is why I assumed it would be the first place it would be."

Dumbledore reached forward, sorely tempted to just take the ring and put it on, to use the stone. Even though it had been many years, he was sorely tempted, to see his parents and his sister again. The ring was standing there, the Resurrection Stone beckoned to him. Even though Dumbledore prided himself on having a stronger will than most but even now he was sorely tempted. He picked up the ring and slipped it around his finger. The moment he did that, before he could turn it, he realized that this was not the Resurrection Stone Horcrux, it was a fake, right as the ring melted into his skin.

Dumbledore dropped to the ground, screaming in pain, the ring continued to melt, despite his attempts to pull it off, but it just caused him even more pain. It was almost like poison from within the stone was slowly being released into his blood stream. He felt sickened, the world spun around him. Dumbledore tried to get a grip on reality, as he raised his wand shakily. He had to inform Severus, he was the only one that could help him. Before it was too late, before the poison spread through his blood stream, as he raised his wand, his Phoenix Patronus rising up.

"Severus...help...Gaunt...shack...ring...fake," rasped Dumbledore as he felt as if his head was on fire. He thought he was going to die, but he managed with his last bit of strength to send out the Patronus. He hoped it would find Severus before it was too late. These thoughts went through Dumbledore's ringing head, before he collapsed to the ground.

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In Number Twelve Grimmauld Place, Harry sat, the silent alarm charm had been activated, which meant only one thing. Ginny's arms were wrapped around him as they laid in bed, but Harry nudged Ginny, as she gave a yawn, as she struggled to gather her senses, but when she heard the alarm, she managed to figure out what Harry was smirking about.

“He swallowed the bait,” said Harry with a smile.

“We knew he would,” said Ginny. “The compulsion charm worked rather well.”

“Worked like a charm,” replied Harry before he groaned at his own bad pun. “That was bad.”

“Yes it was, but Dumbledore’s now in a bit of pain, it’s no less than what he deserves,” said Ginny. “He won’t die right now, right?”

“No, not until I introduce the other component into his blood stream, you know the one that’s sitting in the cave with the fake locket,” said Harry. “The Elder Wand will be as good as ours, it’s just a matter of time.”

“Good Harry, I knew it would work,” said Ginny, as she laid her head on Harry’s chest, with a smile on her face, one that Harry returned as he ran her fingers through her flaming red hair. Once Dumbledore was out of the way and they had all three Hallows, then they could really begin their plans of overhauling the Wizarding World.

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“What just happened Severus?” asked Dumbledore in a voice, his head appeared to be pounding, he had returned to one of the many safe houses that he had set up. His head still felt hot and he could barely hold it up. “I touched the ring...”

“I analyzed your blood stream, the good news is that you will survive, at least for right now, it appears once he left the decoy, the Dark Lord wanted you to remain alive,” answered Snape. “I’ve done as much as I can, but the poison will remain in stasis for a period of just around a year. Perhaps a bit more, but a year is all I can guarantee you with certainty. After that, the stasis spell will fail and then it will lead to a very painful end.”

Then time is of the essence, Harry needs to be prepared for his destiny as soon as possible, I don't have much time," said Dumbledore in a tired voice, as he held the Elder Wand in his hand.

"You expect to convey everything you need to Potter in a year's time?" questioned Snape who looked like he could scarcely believe it.

"It has to be done, Severus," replied Dumbledore coolly, as he examined his hand, it was a nasty shade of purple after absorbing so much poison. "We must stick to the plan, fifteen years ago, Harry was set on the path. There were unintended curves in the road, but after everything, Harry is on his way to the final destination. We've gone too far, it is imperative that Harry is pushed into the role that I intended him to..."

"You've coddled Potter for too long, Dumbledore," interrupted Snape. "If you think he's going to easily be moved into where you want him to be, I think you may be in for disappointment."

"So far, Harry has passed every single test, he's almost ready, he will be ready," responded Dumbledore stubbornly. "Severus, I sense disappointment that you thought you should have been the one that I offered this important role in extending my influence past the grave, to be my successor, but it was not to be. There are demons that you cannot overcome, that even Harry, despite all that he must do, does not have."

"The Dark Lord wishes to kill you, Dumbledore," responded Snape suddenly.

"Which of his Death Eaters does he want to do the trick, Severus," said Dumbledore.

"Me," replied Snape calmly. "He doesn't trust me at all, he wants me to do this as an act of good faith. The only reason that he has not killed me yet as there are a lack of available Potion Masters regularly available. Very few grasped the art, even less in recent years."

"Indeed," said Dumbledore. "So I guess my death is something that is inevitable with the poison in my veins."

"I don't even know if your death would even save me, The Dark Lord has been rather foul tempered as of late and has taken out his failures on a number of Death Eaters more violently then ever before," commented Snape. You're not saying that you wish for me to go along with the Dark Lord's idea for me to kill you."

"That's precisely what I've intended, my death would happen sooner or later, it might as well be at the hands of someone I trust with my life," responded Dumbledore.

"Are you certain the poison has not made you delirious?" inquired Snape.

"No more so than usual, but if you kill me right now, it may look rather staged, especially since Tom would know of the poison currently in stasis in my veins, but when I'm worn down even further, that will be the time, the end of the year once Harry knows everything, once I have taken him to the cave with the false locket Horcrux, that will inspire his final steps towards his destiny," replied Dumbledore. "It will also solve another problem, that I am killed before the Elder Wand can change hands."

"Surely if I kill you, then the Elder Wand will transfer its allegiances over to me," argued Snape.

"That is what the legend wishes for you to believe, but all instances have indicated the wand had changed hands all times before the holder completely died, so I'm certain that once I die, so will the Elder Wand," said Dumbledore.

"What of the real Resurrection Stone?" asked Snape.

"That is a bridge that Harry will have to cross when it is time," answered Dumbledore. "I must admit Tom planting a decoy in such an obvious place was rather cunning but the ring is somewhere, hidden out there."

"I still think you're putting too much faith in Potter," said Snape stubbornly. "What if he finds out that you've been using him as a puppet?"

"That is where Miss Weasley will come in, I'm confident she'll keep Harry anchored to the proper path and when the time is right he will be able to step up," said Dumbledore. "I trust Harry as much as I trust you Severus."

"I still think you're making a mistake," repeated Snape.

"Everything is as it is intended to be, Harry is maturing properly, his girlfriend is a witch from a family who has never had anyone turn to dark magic ever, even though they are estranged from me thanks to the mishap involving Arthur, the Weasleys would never waver off the proper path for too long, they will still support my ideals when the time is right," answered Dumbledore in a confident expression. "Trust me, Severus."

"I do," said Snape curtly, but it was Potter that he had worried about. Dumbledore would not hear one word against his golden boy, in fact Snape would have a better change of convincing a solid brick wall. Still, he could not shake the feeling that Potter was deceiving Dumbledore. Even though he did not want to admit Potter to be that cunning, perhaps there was just a small bit of Lily in him after all as much as he hated to admit it.

"Any luck on locating Horace," said Dumbledore suddenly.

"None at all, he does move around rather well and quickly for someone of his figure," responded Snape. "Something tells me he knows you're looking for him and doesn't want to face you."

"He can't keep evading us forever, we still have almost two months before the school year begins," said Dumbledore but last he heard, Minerva was trying to hold off the Board of Governors, who remarked that if there was no Defense teacher named by August, they were going to pick one for Hogwarts. First, they needed their Potions Professor, before Severus could be moved into the Defense position.

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In the depths of Knockturn Alley, three shadowed figures walked.

"Keep moving, last week, you never know when there could be Aurors crawling around this place," muttered one of the figures nervously.

"Franklin, calm down, if you don't attract any attention, there will be no need to fight, we just bought a couple of cursed baby dolls," said the second shadowed figure.

"Yeah now we can have some fun by donating them to a Muggle Orphanage for some little girls to play with," replied the third shadowed figure with a cackle. "Hug these dolls and they asphyxiate you."

"Still can't believe about the Dark Lord being a half blood," muttered the second figure.

"Nah, that's just that Skeeter woman making up shit again, the Dark Lord is powerful as ever," replied the first figure.

"I don't know, the evidence she made, looked rather real," argued the second figure again.

"Look, it's not like we're high up, we haven't really met the Dark Lord yet," replied the third figure. "Besides, who really cares?"

"I do, are you a blood traitor or something, Reginald?" asked the second figure in a confrontation voice.

"The thing is you're all blood traitors," said a cold voice from above as the trio looked up, to see a figure sitting perched on the edge of a building, dressed in crimson red robes, wearing silver gloves, and an executioner's mask. The voice was obviously distorted and there was no way to tell whether the voice belonged to a male or a female. "Yes, each and every one of you can be considered blood traitors, filth, blemishes on the Wizarding World. "

“Just who do you are anyway?” challenged one of the new recruits on the ground.

“Yeah, with that costume, Halloween is a few months away,” remarked a second recruit snidely.

“Let’s just show unmask this blood traitor,” said the third recruit but the mysterious figure dropped a small pellet to the ground. It exploded, releasing smoke all around the alley, as the inexperienced Death Eaters moved around, as they fired more spells, but their attacker was right behind one who got an explosive blast of fire to the face. He screamed as the fire burnt into his flesh and a conjured metal spike rose up before it impaled into his chest. That was the end of him, as blood spurted out of his chest.

“Come out and fight like a real wizard,” said one of the Death Eaters but a blunt force impacted him magically across the back of the head. He fell to the ground, almost as if the magical personification of a shovel cracked his skull like an eggshell. The broken pieces of his skull impaled into his brain, killing him instantly.

The final attacker felt pain as his wand hand and his wand was broken with a vicious attack, before ropes shot out and wrapped around his arms. The Death Eater begged for mercy as he was hoisted up above the ground like a grotesque puppet as he looked down at the featureless mask of his opponent.

“Two down, one two go down, even harder, but you did ask a question, you asked who I am,” responded the hooded figure, as the Death Eater nodded fearfully. “You have not been tainted by the dark mark so I will grant you only the rest of your miserable life in traction.”

“I have rights, you can’t do this to me!” shouted the Death Eater.

“The people you murder and will murder have rights to but you offer them no consideration,” answered the hooded figure humorlessly. “I do what I must, to atone for what has transpired. Soon each and every Death Eater will meet their downfall because that is what I am.”

The Death Eater looked up at Downfall, this mysterious figure, before he was flung right into the wall. The man screamed as he slammed against the wall at such an impact that every single bone in his body shattered. He could not move but if he could manage it, he would notice that Downfall was gone.

"Downfall, Downfall," muttered the wizard painfully, the words that the Aurors would hear when they arrived on the scene.

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"Downfall, that's what the Death Eater was muttering, Rufus?" asked Amelia as Scrimgeour stood in the office.

"Sounds like someone who's read way too many Muggle comic books, parading around in a Halloween costume," offered Harry, who had been invited in after the Wizengamot meeting to see what's up.

"Sounds like a vigilante operating outside of the laws of the Ministry, like we did not get that enough with Dumbledore and his Order, all the head aches it caused, all those good Aurors lost," replied Rufus as he turned to Harry. "You wouldn't happen to know anything about this, would you, Mr. Potter?"

"Rufus, Harry was at the Ministry of Magic last night around the time of the attacks," said Amelia in a tired voice who tried to avert this problem before Rufus said something that he might regret.

"Yes, it's not like I can be two places at once, I'm good, but not that good," replied Harry.

"Oh yes of course, I just was hoping you might know anything, I never intended for it to come out as of accusing you," said Scrimgeour. "Amelia, I think right now, you do have the best opportunity for becoming Minister of Magic, obviously, I was just in the wings as a stopgap measure just in case..."

"I was killed before the matter was decided, no need to beat around the bush Rufus," answered Amelia. "Still, there have been many near misses and at least nine attempts to poison me in the last week,

thank you Harry for the suggestion for checking my cup before I drank.”

“It’s no problem, Madam Bones,” said Harry.

“It’s just as well I’m not going to be Minister, with this Downfall mess, the Ministry is going to come out like the villains in this one,” replied Scrimgeour.

“Only three people were attacked buying cursed goods in Knockturn Alley, I doubt it’s much of a mess yet,” argued Harry.

“Right now, yes, but later it will be, some people will be glad that Death Eaters are getting killed, but as much as I hate to admit it, they do have rights according to the Ministry law,” answered Scrimgeour. “They will go into Azkaban where they will pay their debt to society, but once we start killing, we’re head down a slippery slope that we may never climb back up.”

“But capturing Death Eaters will be our first priority, but unmasking this Downfall whoever he is,” said Bones.

“Or she,” replied Harry almost as if an afterthought. “It could be a witch underneath the mask for all we know.”

“Point well taken, Harry, until we get more information, we can’t even begin to guess who this Downfall person is,” said Madam Bones. “No matter how noble his or her intentions are, we need to remove the mask.”

“Before its too late,” muttered Harry as he turned, with a slight smile on his face for a brief second before he turned back with a business like expression on his face. “I’m sure you have some things to sort out, so I’ll be heading out. Contact me if I’m needed for anything.”

Madam Bones and Scrimgeour nodded as Harry took this as a chance to excuse himself.

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Harry was poured over notes, everything he could find about the Dementors in every book he had. A knock on the door and Harry looked up, with Sirius walking in.

"Hello, Sirius what brings you here?" asked Harry as he looked back over the notes.

"Just to see what you've been doing, you've been locked up in this room for hours," replied Sirius.

"Going over information on Dementors I'm trying to find a way to eliminate or at least enslave them," said Harry.

"Any progress?" asked Sirius.

"A little, but it's going to take a lot of hard work and even more luck for this to work, but it has to be done," said Harry calmly. "All this fog in London, only one cause, the Dementors and right now, since I removed that cloud of mystery from Voldemort with Rita's article, the most dangerous weapon he has. I'm going to enjoy taking all of Voldemort's toys of fear away one by one, until he has nothing left."

"How many people do you think believed that article, Harry?" asked Sirius.

"A few might have looked at Voldemort in a whole other light, but most of his Death Eaters are too afraid to do anything or too fanatical to believe anything that's shove underneath their nose," said Harry. "However, any doubts I've put in the minds of anyone is much appreciated."

"Voldemort's going to figure out it was you," said Sirius.

"Yes and I bet he'll want to kill me," said Harry. "Of course he kind of already does, but you know..."

"All too well," responded Sirius with a sigh. It was all because of Dumbledore that Harry had a dangerous dark wizard after him, but even he would have to admit Harry was handling the cards life dealt him quite well and even turning negatives into positives on many

occasions. Anyone else in his position, and they would have folded or become arrogant beyond belief.

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Vernon Dursley had seen better days. After those freakish creatures had bounced him and his family from their home and into the sleeves, they lived with his sister Marge. He had lost his job at Grunnings and was about to be indicted for embezzling money from the company. Vernon felt the entire matter was ridiculous, he was just trying to get what he deserved after his hard service but if convicted, he was going to go up the river for a very long time. His wife Petunia had decided to take up drinking and his son was currently in a juvenile correctional facility. Vernon felt the entire matter was absurd, Dudley would never do anything against the law. The entire world was out to get him and his family.

Not to mention that damn dog would not stop humping his leg.

It was all the boy's fault, Vernon wished he had drowned the boy like the rat he was once that Dumbledore dumped him on his doorstep that day. It would have saved a lot of problems and they would still be normal.

A knocking on the door brought Vernon out of his murderous visions of his worthless nephew. Vernon stepped forward and opened the door to see his son standing there.

"Dudley?" asked Vernon but much to his horror, his son fell to the ground, several razor sharp needles impaled into the back of Dudley's neck. Right behind Dudley, mounted on a broomstick, sat a figure with crimson red robes, silver gloves, and a black executioner's mask, one that Death Eaters had learned to fear.

"Good evening Dursley," said Downfall crisply as Vernon backed off. "I decided, the good kind hearted soul I was, to break your son out of his little juvenile facility so you could watch him die. You brought this on him, Dursley, you were a worthless father and an even more worthless human being."

"I don't know who you are but if you don't get out of here, I'm calling the police right now!" shouted Vernon angrily as he moved towards the phone but a blast of red light struck the phone, blowing it into dust. Vernon saw that the figure held a stick in their hand. "You're one of them, aren't you?"

"I know you Vernon Dursley, how you've cheated on your wife with much younger woman, how you steal money from your company, and yes, how you've abused your own nephew," said Downfall. "I know every little filthy secret in your pathetic life, Dursley."

"Listen here you masked freak, I won't be talked to you like that!" yelled Vernon angrily as he lunged for the figure but he was out of reach. A snap of a coil and he was wrapped with some kind of razor wire. The more he moved or even breathed, the wire cut into his skin, blood dripped to the ground.

"The real freak is you Vernon Dursley, one who condemns a child because of your own prejudices," said Downfall crudely as Vernon slowly bled to death as the wire cut deeper into his skin. "However, I will offer you one compliment. At least your wife is a bigger freak than you could ever hope to be, with what she's guilty of."

"You won't get away with this," grunted Vernon with one feeble breath as the wire cut into his skin as he dropped to the ground.

"Neither did you apparently," said Downfall humorlessly as he watched Vernon expire and he saw Marge Dursley stand in the hallway, eyes widened with what she saw.

"What did you do to my brother?" demanded Marge roughly.

"Made him pay for his crimes," said Downfall softly. "I'm your judge, jury, and executioner, emphasis on executioner and you have been put on trial for crimes against human decency."

Before Marge could respond, she was thrown viciously into a wall. The back of her neck snapped at an awkward angle and was killed instantly from the impact.

“Now where is Petunia,” said Downfall as the masked figure moved down the hallway. Petunia Dursley was at the end of the hallway, fearful, taking a step back. “Come forth Petunia, come and meet justice.”

“Stay away from me!” shouted Petunia as she threw a glass ornament at Downfall but it just bounced off, before it shattered on the floor. Several ropes shot out and wrapped around Petunia, as Downfall skillfully maneuvered the broom backwards, dragging Petunia down the hallway. Petunia was leaned against the wall and some invisible force held her in place. She tried to move but found she was unable to but she was unable to talk as well.

“Now Petunia, your crimes are most heinous of all, you condemned your nephew to an abusive childhood, throwing him in a cupboard, to compensate for your own inadequacies,” said Downfall. “A failure of a husband and even bigger failure of a son, the fact you could not let go of the jealousy of your sister being a witch. All of that excuses nothing, you had no excuse for what you’ve done. I judge you guilty of vile crimes against human decency; your own putrid actions have caused you to meet your downfall. The punishment is destruction without a trace.”

Petunia whimpered but Downfall raised a gloved hand, before she was slapped viciously in the face.

“You have no right to sob, you deserve no tears, after what you’ve done, you disgusting piece of human filth,” said Downfall as Petunia’s cheek had burn marks from where the glove slapped into it. “I see it in your pathetic eyes. You wish to see the face of the one who has brought you to justice.”

Petunia managed to somehow nod as she faced this shadow, this horrible creature but she wanted to see its face, if it had one that was.

“So be it,” answered Downfall as the hood was lifted and Petunia’s eyes widened in absolute shock when she saw who was underneath the mask. That was the last thing she saw before she was rendered unconscious.

Downfall walked outside and quickly located the gas line, playing a dozen round objects on it, before tapping it with a wand. The Incendio Bombs were activated to go off in approximately sixty seconds. Downfall walked to the end of the driveway before turning and putting one gloved hand up, as if to blow a kiss.

“Bon voyage, Dursleys,” said Downfall softly, as the magical bombs activated and the gas lines blew the entire house sky high, everything destroyed by the magically created fire in a matter of seconds.

There’s Chapter Thirty, a perfect place to end. Chapter Thirty One is coming with fallout from the events at the end of this one and more Death Eaters getting an all expenses paid vacation to the afterlife(including a couple of semi-notable faces). I’ll no doubt have much to say in the author notes for Chapter Thirty One, but right now, I’ll just let the chapter speak for itself.

Chapter Thirty One: Deception

Harry sat in his bedroom right on the table, as he had the Resurrection Stone right in front of him, almost staring back at him, with Ginny sitting on the other side, as she read over Harry's notes on the Dementors with great interest. Harry had done quite a bit of work over the past week or so, looking up everything that was known about Dementors. Granted, there was a lot that was known about the affects Dementors had on people but on the contrary there was just as much not known as well. Harry had done a good job in piecing together information from many different books, most of it vague and logically coming to conclusions. Even though there was often very little logic to be found within the workings of magic, Harry had still did about as well as he could be expected.

"It looks good so far Harry, I can't see any holes in it or anything you missed," summarized Ginny as she placed Harry's notes neatly back into a pile.

"I know, but there is something that's lacking, without actual test subjects, without using anything I come up with on actual Dementors, it's for nothing, and I don't even know if anything will work," said Harry. "But I have to keep working on this, all that fog, it just means the Dementors are breeding and there will be more than them."

"Don't remind me," responded Ginny with a shudder at the thought of Dementors breeding. It just seemed wrong on many, many levels. She saw Harry's eyes avert back to the Resurrection Stone and it was obvious he kept intently studying it.

"Obsession is something that I don't really wish to fall into, but I can't help but be rather intrigued about the possibilities of the Resurrection Stone, namely the questions that it can help me answer," said Harry as he looked at the Resurrection Stone. "Including some questions that I'm not truly sure if I want to be answered, but I've read anything that I could find on the Hallows. All accounts of those who have possessed the Resurrection Stone have tried to bring people back, but failed to realize one simple truth."

"No magic can resurrect the dead," answered Ginny and Harry responded with a nod of his head.

"Precisely, but there is a fine line between resurrecting the dead and communicating with them, magic is mostly about intention," said Harry to himself, repeating a line he used in the D.A. meetings more times than he could count. "People used the stone to attempt to bring someone back to life and that's where all the problems happened."

"Well the entire Resurrection Stone name is rather misleading," responded Ginny.

"That's the point I think, Ginny," said Harry as he looked at the Resurrection Stone. "Of course people should really research potentially dangerous magical artifacts before using them. True, it cuts down on the idiot population, but still, I haven't even touched this thing, even though I've been sorely tempted to use it many, many, times."

"To speak to your parents?" asked Ginny softly, even if it was obvious that there was only one thing that Harry could get out of the Resurrection Stone. It hinted that the Stone could be used to create Inferi, as a seventeenth century dark wizard had proved to do, but other than that there were not too many uses for the Stone other than contacting the dead and getting tormented by an emotionless shade to the point of madness for attempting to fully resurrect lost love ones.

"Mum more than anything, it's been almost two years since that letter that I found and while her advice was pretty much clear cut, I still want to ask her advice on some things and there are other things I need to know," replied Harry as he looked at Ginny, who grabbed his hands encouragingly, as he looked far off. "Dad, well, I don't know how to say this, but I honestly think he would be the type of person that we need to go against. He was closed minded, petty, had a rather distinct black and white view of the world. I'm sure he had some good qualities as well, but still, would it have been enough to outweigh the bad? I don't even know if I want to answer that."

"Sirius and your father were said to be alike and you trust Sirius," said Ginny but Harry once again shook his head.

“On the surface maybe, they were both pranksters, they got in trouble a lot, they were both in Gryffindor,” said Harry with an expression on his face that indicated he was confident in what he was talking about. “However, Sirius did have almost twelve years in Azkaban and got to see the flaws of the Wizarding World, the so called light side up close and personal. Proof that Dumbledore and Voldemort are two sides of the same bent coin and Remus, obviously his experience that both sides have their flaws goes without saying.”

“Harry, it’s really up to do what you want to do, you have the Resurrection Stone, all it takes is three turns as the book says,” said Ginny.

“It seems so easy, doesn’t it?” asked Harry with a slight smile. “Almost too easy, I want to talk to her, but the fact is the Stone needs a strong connection between the person using it and the spirit of the person it’s being used on, so...”

“She did sacrifice her life for you, so I can’t see there being a much stronger connection between the living and the dead than that,” said Ginny logically. .

“So says Dumbledore, that’s one thing I want to ask her as well if I do this, was it a simple sacrifice or was there something more complex involved to trip up Voldemort?” asked Harry with a frown, he was not going to buy the simplistic power of love sacrifice for a second. Truthfully, his mother did something to allow him to live and love had to be involved, but it was just not at all probable for Harry to think it was just a simple sacrifice.

“Whatever you do Harry, it will be the right decision for you,” said Ginny, with a smile at the thought that most people would use the Resurrection Stone without even thinking one moment at any potential consequences. Harry had meticulously researched the Stone and all of the Hallows for that matter from the moment he found out about it. It was hard to say that there was a person alive that knew more about the Deathly Hallows and how they worked than they both did.

"It will be," answered Harry who had too many questions that were bursting to get out, like his mother's friendship with Snape. That baffled him to no end. He hoped that his mother was using Snape to gain knowledge, as Bellatrix had implied, because that was the least sickening explanation he could think of. Harry knew first hand what needed to be done to receive a dark mark thanks to Voldemort's memories and while Dumbledore might have bought Snape's little sob story about having second thoughts, most likely because Dumbledore had a use for Snape in his plans, Harry would always think of Snape as a foul piece of dung with no redeeming qualities at all. He doubted that Snape would have been any different as a child.

Right then a small buzzing had brought Harry out of his thoughts.

"Sounds like your Dumbledore early warning system went off," commented Ginny.

"Better go see what he wants," said Harry even though he knew precisely why Dumbledore was here before he gave Ginny a quick kiss good bye. "I'll see you later, Ginny."

"I better get going, lunch is coming up soon at home anyway," replied Ginny a bit sourly, as spending even an hour in the presence of her mother was rather frustrating. If anything, she had become even more controlling and overbearing since the death of Arthur Weasley. It was lucky she only had to keep up this charade of living at the Burrow until Harry's plans for the end of Dumbledore had taken place, because if she stayed there until she became of age, she would go crazy.

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Sirius watched Dumbledore arrive with frustration. He hoped that he had seen the last of Dumbledore since he had been banned by the Ministry of Magic for reforming the Order of the Phoenix. Stomaching the man for a few seconds was torture after what he did to Harry and by extension Sirius as well. In fact, Sirius admired Harry for acting like he had actually still respected the man, because it was an acting job that he would have never been able to pull off.

"Hello, Dumbledore, may I help you?" asked Sirius in a bit of a cold voice as Dumbledore arrived but if Dumbledore had noticed, the former Hogwarts Headmaster did not say one word.

"A grave matter has come up, that requires me to speak to young Harry right away, just if I can ask for five minutes of his time," said Dumbledore.

"As Harry's legal guardian, I insist that I stay here and observe whatever you say to him," replied Sirius and Dumbledore looked rather put off that Sirius was dictating the terms of the meeting. As much as he hated to admit it, he had pretty much no choice in the matter whatsoever. As Severus had bluntly pointed out to him, he was just a wizard with above average magical power and pretty much no political power. The name Dumbledore was mud outside of a small group of people.

"Did I hear my name?" asked Harry as he entered the room and looked at Dumbledore. "Albus, what brings you here?"

"Please take a seat Harry, as I was just telling Sirius, I have grave news I need to relate to you," replied Dumbledore, as he also thought of in addition to the news he had to give Harry, he still had not located Horace Slughorn and his window was running short. The Board of Governors were going to pick the Defense Against the Dark Arts teacher, if he could not find Horace to replace Severus in potions within the next three weeks.

"So what is this urgent news?" asked Sirius coolly.

"There is no delicate way to notify you of this tragedy," said Dumbledore calmly, as Harry just waited for the news to drop. "I believe that I should inform you before this hits the Daily Prophet that your aunt, uncle, and cousin, along with your uncle's sister, were brutally slaughtered a day ago."

"How did they meet their downfall?" asked Harry in a mock surprised voice.

“A magical explosion, I’m afraid, there is no way in telling if that was to kill them or to cover up any evidence of the murders,” said Dumbledore, who doubted Harry was aware of the unintentional double meaning of his question. The mysterious masked figure known as Downfall, who had killed a number of supported Voldemort supporters, had been the number one suspect of the Dursley murders. Dumbledore felt this Downfall was going about things the wrong way, mass murder was never the answer, anyone committing crimes should be taken to Azkaban where they could pay their debt to society.

“That’s awful,” said Harry in shock. “They had no chance I take it.”

“None at all, I doubt I would have been able to stop them in time,” said Dumbledore, who had the Dursleys monitored to make sure they were not the target of vengeance crazed wizards and witches who had heard about Harry’s childhood. Since he was on the run and since the Order membership had been sliced in half, before he was forced to disband it due to the magically binding contract that Amelia had him sign, he no longer had the resources to protect the Dursleys. There had been seven attempts on their lives up to this, that the Order just barely managed to stop. “We could be dealing with a threat that endangers us all, both Muggle and magic, even beyond Lord Voldemort himself. Downfall, no doubt an accurate name for some poor soul’s descent into madness and twisted, distorted morals, going about things the wrong way to administer justice.”

“So you think this Downfall person is behind this, Dumbledore?” asked Sirius who thought the Dursleys deserved everything they got.

“My theories do point that way, but I have been known to be mistaken before,” said Dumbledore and Harry struggled not to make some sarcastic remark at this statement made by Dumbledore. If the old man had saw anything out of the ordinary in Harry’s expression, he said nothing. “I will leave at this moment to allow you to be alone with your grief. I offer my condolences at your loss Harry and if there is anything you need in this tragic time, do not at all hesitate to contact me.”

“Right, thank you Albus,” said Harry as he fixed his face into a somber expression but deep underneath the mask, he felt nothing but joy and release. Only one connection to the past of the old naïve Harry that allowed everyone to walk over him had remained and that one would be eliminated when the time was right. Harry watched Dumbledore hold the Elder Wand absent mindedly, knowing that it would belong to him and Ginny all too soon.

Patience was the name of the game, one Harry Potter had mastered with absolute perfection. With the Dursleys gone, it was like a gigantic weight had been lifted off of his back, which was one element of his past that he would not be haunted with ever again.

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Daphne looked at the front page of the Daily Prophet with the article revealing Voldemort’s past, she had briefly thought about having it framed, it gave her so much amusement even though it came out about a week ago. As she had overheard her parents saying in the past, careful not to let anyone too important in an earshot hear, that all those important purebloods were fools joining up with Voldemort. While many of them thought they were getting a little bit of power, quite frankly they were being used to allow Voldemort to gain even more power and stature. She agreed when Harry had said that Voldemort would use his followers as long as he needed them and then once they had no more use for him, that was the end.

The Daily Prophet article, while it had Rita Skeeter’s name on it, Daphne saw Harry’s words coming flowing on the paper and doubted that every single person in the D.A. noticed the same things. It was the next logical step in the plan to bring about change, to throw confusion through the ranks of the purists about the purity of their crusader of eliminating all things that were not pure. Granted, many would refuse to believe it and among those who did, some would be too terrified to oppose Voldemort. However, the seeds of doubt were there and the blood purists had never been more divided. Several small factions would be much easier to deal with than a larger, more unified group or as close to unified as pureblood bigots ever got. They could never work together for too long anyway to begin with.

Daphne paused as she heard a sound from outside of her room. At first, she thought it was one of the house elves being careless, but it was rather late at night and they had never been that careless before to make so much noise. Carefully, she held her wand, just in case it was a Death Eater trying to send a message. Their parents had been recruited before and had turned down all offers, so perhaps Voldemort wanted a bit extra manpower and decided to scare them into joining.

She pushed open the door and breathed a sigh of relief, as she saw her sister walking around. Astoria turned in surprise.

"Oh hello Daphne," said Astoria in an absent minded voice.

"What are you doing wandering around at this time at night anyway?" asked Daphne surveying her sister with interest. "I thought it was someone breaking into the house."

"Sorry about that," said Astoria in an apologetic voice as she followed Daphne into her room. "It's just I've had a lot of things on my mind lately..."

"I know, Voldemort's back, we all fear that he could get us at any time, but it's nothing to really lose too much sleep over," replied Daphne calmly.

"No, after all we've learned in the D.A., I'm actually not too worried about myself against Death Eaters, but I'm worried about...well I'm worried about Draco," said Astoria and Daphne looked at her sister with a sigh. Draco had barely given Astoria the time of the day, yet she still pined for him. It was rather pathetic how she held onto these feelings for someone who barely cared she existed.

"Yes, what about him?" asked Daphne after a few seconds pause.

"Well, Draco's going to be of age in another year and unless something happens, he's going to be forced to join Voldemort," said Astoria.

"No one's holding a wand to his head, Astoria," replied Daphne. "Well actually they are, but if he really wanted not to follow in his father's footsteps, he would find some way to avoid joining Voldemort. The thing is, I don't see him not following in Lucius Malfoy's footsteps."

"Look Daphne, I know you don't care too much for Draco, but cut him some slack, he doesn't know any other way," said Astoria. "If he had a little bit more of a backbone and had his own opinions he might be a halfway decent person. He just acts that way because everyone expects him to act that way."

"Right, Astoria, but the fact is, I doubt he'll change his ways after all of these years, especially when Parkinson has him wrapped so tightly around her finger," said Daphne logically, who knew Pansy Parkinson was nothing else but nasty and refused to give up anything she claimed for herself without a fight.

"I don't...it would be a lot easier if all of the Death Eaters dropped dead," said Astoria in an absent minded tone of voice, as she looked at Daphne. "Harry might be the only one that fight Voldemort, but if someone could take care of the others, it would make everything much easier."

"Well, the Daily Prophet has been reporting about this Downfall character," said Daphne with a smirk. "He, she, or it, has knocked down a few Death Eaters, no one notable, in fact some of them have not been marked."

"Really, I haven't heard," answered Astoria calmly as she turned away to look away from Daphne. Daphne frowned, her sister was acting odd, even for her. "Do you have any idea who is behind it?"

"Well obviously I have some ideas, but I don't want to say who it is unless I know it's under the mask even though the obvious suspect would make sure that they can't be linked back to these attacks," said Daphne. "All I know is this person, whoever they are, is doing something that the Ministry of Magic and Dumbledore should have done years ago."

“Yes, Daphne, I really need to go, to bed,” said Astoria quickly and Daphne just shrugged, before allowing her sister to leave. School would begin in a month and a half and Daphne could hardly wait as it would prove to be an interesting year.

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In the Hog’s Head bar in Hogsmeade, Walden MacNair looked over some rare and quite dangerous potions ingredients that were restricted by Ministry law. His two companions, while not that high up in the Death Eater ranks due to their mediocre abilities, had connections that allowed them access some rather rare potions ingredients that the Dark Lord required for his experiments on forced werewolf transformation.

“Very impressive,” said MacNair gruffly as he took the bag filled with properly stored ingredients. “Everything appears to be in order, the Dark Lord will be pleased, I shall get these ingredients to Severus as soon as possible, so he can use them as if he would.”

MacNair would leave but first he needed another drink. He looked towards the inattentive bartender, who just looked back at MacNair with a rough look on his face.

“Another firewhiskey, I presume,” said the bartender and MacNair nodded, he had already had quite a lot to drink and while drinking and Disapparating were highly discourage, he could care less right at the moment. He moved forward, a bit staggered as the two Death Eaters at the table to engage in some conversation.

“I think I better get going,” said Allan Rosier, the younger brother of the infamous Death Eater that took no less than Mad Eye Moody to take down. He had been too young to join the Dark Lord the first time around, but now the moment he heard word he might have been back, he joined to help put the Mudbloods, Muggles, half bloods, and blood traitors in their place. “It’s late and you know what happens to Death Eaters who stay out late, Ruben.”

“Yes, Downfall, if he shows up tonight, I’ll rip him apart,” said Ruben, who was slightly drunk. “I don’t know what you’re worrying about,

Rosier. He's just nothing but smoke and mirrors, in a straight up duel, this Downfall doesn't have a chance. Even Crabbe and Goyle might stand a chance of defeating the blood..."

Ruben stopped when what appeared to be a dung bomb had rolled onto their table. It appeared to be a dud from all things considered, but he picked it up to remove it. The second it touched his skin, the supposed dung bomb glowed orange, before it heated up. Ruben tried to throw the bomb away but found it stuck to his hand before it burst into flames. The Death Eater shrieked in agony as he spontaneously combusted right before the eyes of Rosier who leapt up. The fire burned into his skin and kept burning through his robes as it spread through his body. For a brief second there was a burning skeleton visible before ashes dropped to the ground, all that remained of the Death Eater.

Rosier looked around in fear, before the Death Eater made his way towards the door as quickly as possible. MacNair turned around in confusion as he watched a yellow light cut through the air. Magically conjured acid splashed all over Rosier, causing the Death Eater to shriek in agony as he dropped to the ground, the severe acid burns causing him pain before something blunt struck his chest. His heart sped up, beating too fast before it exploded. Rosier dropped to the ground, to know no more.

"Alright, come out and face me like a real man," grunted MacNair, who was ready.

"That is something that you Death Eaters are far from," said an almost ghostly voice, as the figure of Downfall stepped from the shadows. MacNair faced his adversary and threw two deadly spells towards the figure that had been plagued Death Eaters recently. The spells appeared to bounce off of Downfall, with no effort whatsoever.

"CRUCIO!" shouted MacNair desperately but even that spell had little effect, so he decided to switch gears a little bit to a bigger gun. "AVADA KEDAVRA!"

Downfall gave a flick of the wrist and a solid shield rose up, to absorb the impact of the Killing Curse. Another flick and MacNair was

wrapped up in thick chains that could not be broken even with magic. The Death Eater dropped to the ground. It was obvious that the bartender had slipped in the back room, perhaps to contact the Aurors, but something told MacNair they would not arrive in time.

“Walden MacNair, you ruthlessly execute magical creatures for the Ministry of Magic, because they don’t understand them and thus consider what they couldn’t understand dangerous,” said Downfall as MacNair attempted to maneuver for his wand, but Downfall brought a foot down, breaking both MacNair’s wand and several of his fingers. “You do not stop for just your work in the Ministry, you hunt several endangered magical creatures to the point of extinction and you’ve hunted Muggles for sport. Your actions are disgusting and are worthy of justice.”

“Then send me to Azkaban, I’ll just get out,” slurred MacNair.

“You aren’t going to Azkaban, you will meet a similar fate of many of your victims both human and beast,” said Downfall in a chilling tone of voice as MacNair was flipped over onto his front. He could see the shadow of a large axe being magically raised in the air and in a flash it swung right towards the back of his neck. Even with his wand, his wits, and out of his chains, there would be no way to stop the inevitable.

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Several pops echoed outside, as many Aurors arrived outside of the Hog’s Head. There was an emergency there but since there was no dark mark, it appeared to be something that would not be too difficult to handle. Their department was underfunded and had been run absolutely ragged recently.

A young Auror, who had only been working in the department for eight years, had never seen the amount of deaths. People killed in their own homes, tortured, and most times not even in one piece. He moved forward but a sound echoed. The window in front of the Hog’s Head had shattered, as the Aurors stepped back in absolute shock and in disgust. One of the Aurors threw up when she realized what was before her.

It was the decapitated head of Walden MacNair, the former executioner of the Department of the Disposal of Dangerous Magical Creatures and recently convicted Death Eater, with his spinal cord dangling out of the back of his neck, blood dripping from it. It was a disgusting vision, especially when the eyeball had just popped slightly out of the decapitated head, with the nerve ending hooked the end.

“Everyone inside, the murderer could be inside!” shouted Dawlish, the Auror in charge of the mission and he broke down the doors, to see the mysterious figure known as Downfall. This was the first time any of them had seen Downfall up close, the figure had an Executioner’s mask that completely covered the face of the suspect, gloves had covered the hands, and a large crimson robe covered the body, with a mysterious bag in hand. There was no way to identify who he or she was. “Hands in the air and wand where we can see it, remove your mask or we will not hesitate to use force.”

Without even moving, a pellet hit the ground and exploded, releasing a blue smoke into the pub. The Aurors coughed, as they held their mouths, as they threw stunning spells into the smoke, but did not even come close to hitting their target.

“I will be light on you, because you’re just doing your jobs, but I must offer you a warning to stay out of my way, as I will administer the justice that the Ministry is incapable of doing so and if you meddle too often, I will consider you an enemy to my crusade,” said the disembodied voice of Downfall, as several of the Aurors wondered if this person was even human. “I will cleanse the world of all undesirables, including within your own department. There are those among us who have the taint of corruption. People that are blood traitors, with sympathies towards Riddle and thus they must be punished. They will be punished most severely.”

The smoke cleared as the Aurors moved around, but Downfall had disappeared. There was no hint of where he had ended up. They saw the downed body of another patron and knew they were dealing with a ruthless murderer. Scrimgeour had given them orders to bring in Downfall at all costs, no matter how much the Head Auror sympathized with his intentions against Death Eaters and few shed

any tears over the death of the abusive relatives of Harry Potter, the fact was he was breaking the law.

Several did wonder about Downfall's claims that there were Death Eaters within their own ranks. They would never look at each other the same again, as they wondered who could they trust, if they could trust anyone.

One in particular was nervous, because he was in fact a Death Eater and had to now relay to the Dark Lord the news of what happened. He loathed doing so, as he did not want to be on the receiving end of the infamous temper of his master, but it must be done.

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Voldemort sat in the depths of his base of operation as a nervous young man approached him, his spy within the ranks of the Aurors, who had briefed him on the security plans based on several targeted Ministry officials. Naturally, as any smart strategist would do, the Dark Lord picked and chose who he would go after rather carefully. The wizard knelt before him and Voldemort slowly turned to acknowledge him. On the other side, stood Lucius Malfoy, who had lost quite a bit of stature within the ranks of the Death Eaters. If the man did not have gold, Voldemort would have killed him in the blink of an eye.

"Yes, Peterson, rise to your feet and report," said Voldemort softly, as he looked at the Auror.

"My Lord, there has been an incident, at the Hog's Head, MacNair was murdered...Downfall is real, my Lord, not just some myth, I saw whoever it was in the flesh," said Peterson nervously and Voldemort just stared at his spy, with lack of interest in his place.

"Potter, perhaps you are not as golden as the world wishes you to be," answered Voldemort softly and Lucius's eyes widened at these words.

"My Lord, you believe Potter and Downfall are one and the same?" asked Lucius who was even surprised as his own boldness.

"That is precisely what I am suggesting Lucius, who else would be as bold to defy me in such a manner," said Voldemort. "Dumbledore might have been a suspect, but killing is not his style, Potter will pay for this mockery of me just like those lies he spread to Rita Skeeter. In fact, Lucius, give the word to the rest of the followers that this Downfall is to be unmasked, to prove that I am correct. I'm offering five thousand Galleons, to be taken out of your vault as penitence for your failure, for anyone who could remove that putrid mask and bring me whoever it is underneath it. Even if it happens not to be Potter, I still wish to exterminate whomever it is personally."

"At once, my Lord," said Lucius, who thought that the Dark Lord may be intimidated by Downfall just a bit, because it was a force that was mostly unknown to him. It was the same tactic that the Dark Lord used to spread fear and now it was being use against him. Whether or not Downfall was in fact Harry Potter, it remained to be seen. Lucius doubted it very much, but he was in no place to argue.

"My Lord, I do have information that you might find useful of the security specifications of the soon to be Minister Bones," said Peterson and Voldemort turned, his attention completely on his Auror spy. "There is a lull in security protection between midnight and twelve fifteen at night, when the protections around the house recharge themselves. Next Saturday, when she is officially named Minister of Magic, she will return at five after midnight by a Portkey."

"Precisely the proper moment to trap her," said Voldemort. He had attempted to recruit Amelia Bones in the past, she was an able witch and a potentially valuable asset to his plans, but like many other members of that family, she had defied Voldemort by refusing to join him. She also proved to a problem for Voldemort's eventual takeover plans for the Minister of Magic, as she would actually be proactive in weeding out potential supporters. That was one thing that would prove rather problematic. "You're dismissed Peterson, you have done well."

"Thank you, my Lord, you are too kind," said the spy as he walked out, to leave Voldemort along. Soon Bones would die, as would Dumbledore, and Potter.

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Peterson arrived home to his flat. As a single Auror who was at the office most of the time, there was little need to have an extravagant home. He walked forward and he stopped as he came face to face with Downfall, who was standing calmly in the hallway.

"You!" shouted Peterson as he backed off, to hold his wand up. "What are..."

"Peterson, you are an Auror, to protect and serve the Wizarding World, no matter who they are, yet you conspire to give information that you are entrusted with to Lord Voldemort," said Downfall crisply as Peterson found himself disarmed. He moved over towards the fireplace, in an attempt to contact the Aurors but two sharp objects impacted the back of the legs. He felt his body go numb, his legs were unable to move as he fell down to the ground. He saw this figure over him, stalking him, almost as if measuring him, sizing him up for the killing.

"Stay away from me!" shouted Peterson in a loud voice, but his mouth was the only thing he could move.

"In the matter of moments, the poison will paralyze you and then will slowly kill you," said Downfall crudely. "It is no less than you deserve, in fact it is much more than you deserve, considering the trust that others have you have breached and lead people to their graves. Rest assure I can see in your pathetic mind what is being planned but you will not live long enough to allow Riddle to know."

Peterson's bodily functions shut down one by one, as it hurt to breath. By the time he died, Downfall had already disappeared. It was not even like the mysterious figure was even there. That was the last thought that passed through the former spy's mind before he knew no more.

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The Wizengamot courtroom was converted slightly, to accommodate more people, as was the tradition for when a new Minister of Magic. Obviously given the mounting concerns that Voldemort would attack, there was a bit extra attention giving to security, as there were Aurors had every entrance, who had checked and double checked identities, making sure everyone had their passes, also checking for Polyjuice Potions being used and any use under the Imperius Curse.

Right now, Harry and Ginny walked inside, as Ginny looked at the décor in the courtrooms, with an amazed look on his face. Harry had already seen it being put up, but even then he was slightly impressed. He saw Aurors, some badly attempting to hide themselves, to be able to deal with any potential troublemakers immediately.

“Amazing,” said Ginny after she looked around, arm linked with Harry as they walked around. The courtroom had been rather bland and for good reason, it was just to pass laws, not to throw a celebration.

“Yes, it is, but not as nearly amazing as the girl I have on my arm,” replied Harry with a smile. “You look beautiful in those robes, not that you wouldn’t look beautiful in anything.”

“Or nothing at all,” replied Ginny with a mischievous smile and wink.

“All too true, but I think we should try and confirm that theory later,” said Harry.

“Yes we will,” said Ginny who knew they had to stick around for a bit, just long enough for Minister Bones to get through her speech and make sure no one had decided to try anything. It was rather late in the evening, a bit after nine, when people started arriving for the big moment.

“Harry, Ginny!” shouted Susan Bones as she rushed over to greet them. “I’ve trust you have been keeping safe this summer.”

“About as much as we can,” said Harry. “How about you?”

"Well to be fair, Aunt Amelia has been the target of the attacks, not me, three today in fact, Scrimgeour has increased the security," said Susan.

"Four attacks actually," replied Harry. "One of them, wasn't even that well planned, a Muggle put under the Imperius Curse, snuck into the Ministry with a cursed dagger."

"He was taken down quickly, I bet the next attempt will be from Voldemort himself," said Ginny and with that, Susan looked rather worried. "Don't worry, security is rather tight tonight, Harry's made sure of it."

"Yes, if Voldemort steps through that door, I'll know and I'll be ready, of course there are about six people, no wait eight people, here with dark marks," said Harry as he looked at the map of the Ministry of Magic, before placing it back into his robes. "Don't worry, I know who they are and we're keeping an eye on them."

"That's good," said Susan who looked around, any of these people, mostly high ranking Ministry officials and respected pureblood nobles could be potential Death Eaters.

"Yes, they do tend to let all sorts of people in to these Ministry events," said Daphne who had walked over to join them. Her parents and Astoria were in the distance, she had snuck over to greet her friends. "Susan, Harry, Ginny, good evening, I see you have the misfortune of being at this rather drab political affair."

"My scar has certain obligations," said Harry dryly, aware of the irony that technically he did not really have a scar anymore. Once Dumbledore was gone, he could remove the glamours, which were a pain to keep in place constantly in public.

"Aunt Amelia insisted that I be here as well, I may be taking over her seat soon and she wants me to meet some of the fellow Wizengamot representatives," said Susan who looked rather disinterested with the prospect and Harry could hardly blame her.

“Well just hang in there, it will be over before you know it,” said Ginny in a sympathetic voice as her eyes narrowed. “What is he doing here?”

“Malfoy, that’s a good question, and his mother as well,” said Daphne as she looked forward to see the two. “Well Narcissa Malfoy is still well connected beyond her husband, so I’m guessing that Draco is coming along for the ride, he looks to be about as interested to be here as we do.”

Ginny nodded, before her and Harry drifted off to interact with the guests. Harry had warned her that these Ministry gatherings were beyond dull, but she had no idea. There were a bunch of people there out of political obligation, to try and strengthen connections, while reestablishing old ones. Then there were a bunch of underage witches and wizards, who were dragged on for the ride.

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Narcissa Malfoy watched Harry Potter and his date with intrigue. Potter had shown a great bit of class for someone who was raised by Muggles, even more than her own son. In fact, if it was not for the red hair, Narcissa would have never guessed that Potter’s date was a Weasley as well, she showed a grace and presence that put many purebloods to shame.

She watched her son, conducting himself rather poorly, with a sigh. This was all Lucius’s fault, he had allowed Draco to have a rather high opinion of himself and his arrogance ballooned over the years. Truthfully, the marriage with Lucius had been a mutually beneficial arrangement. Narcissa gave Lucius the heir he wanted to continue the Malfoy family legacy and Lucius gave Narcissa the massive fortune to continue living the lifestyle that she was accustomed to. Both won, even though Narcissa was disgusted with her husband joining the Dark Lord. Not that she disagreed with any of the views of the Dark Lord, but rather it just proved Lucius was so weak that he needed someone to follow. The information given in the Daily Prophet had just caused Narcissa to lose all respect for the Dark Lord, even though once again she sympathized with many of his plans or what he claimed to be his plans.

Now her son had bragged he was going to join the Dark Lord when he became of age next year. Narcissa had tried to discourage him the best she could without coming out and voicing her distaste for the Dark Lord, but her pleas fell on deaf ears. Draco was highly likely to be killed on his first mission or at least severely injured. Narcissa dreaded the day her son turned seventeen, it was one that she was not looking forward to begin with.

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"I think you don't have too much longer before you can make your move, Harry," said Luna logically as she spoke with Ginny and Harry, with Neville hanging to the side, as his grandmother moved around, socializing with the Ministry officials, almost in a political fashion. Luna was there as Neville's date, as she would have never gotten an invitation otherwise.

"Soon enough Luna," said Ginny calmly. "Voldemort might have doubled up his attacks in the last couple of weeks but we're ready for anything."

"Yes, several members of the D.A. have already contacted me, thanking me, as what they learned help them fend off Death Eaters, long enough to get themselves and their families to safety," added Harry, who was slowly removing the influence that Voldemort's followers had within the Ministry.

"They should thank you, everything that they have learned is of use," said Luna as she looked at Neville, as his grandmother was motioning for him to go over.

"Looks like Gran wants me to meet some more people, no doubt she's talking up my skills, saying that I'm as good as my parents were," said Neville, as thanks to Harry, he had improved. He would never be as good as Harry or even Ginny, but still he was not an embarrassment anymore.

"She's still retiring when you're of age, so you can have the Wizengamot seat?" asked Ginny, and Neville nodded. Ginny smiled,

Susan and Daphne were in line for seats and Harry already had his seat that would be four of them. "Good, we're slowly influencing the Wizengamot."

Harry just smiled, while Ginny only thought there would be four of them, there would be five of the six leaders of the D.A. on the Wizengamot, once he had given her the Dumbledore seat for her birthday. He made a mental note to expose one of the Death Eaters who had no heirs on the Wizengamot, so he could maneuver Luna into that seat during the future. They would truly go from running the D.A. to running the Wizengamot. Harry was rather glad that the new Chief Warlock that replaced Dumbledore was a puppet.

"Well, I better get going, you know how Gran gets," said Neville as he walked over.

"Looks like Amelia is going to make her speech," muttered Harry, as he moved over with Ginny. The noise had died down; the pureblood nobles apparently were done brown nosing, as Harry made his way over, him and Ginny close together, wands at the ready. They could see Susan who looked very annoyed with the Auror guard that kept hanging over her, but it was for her own safety. He caught the tail end of the new Minister being announced, as she walked up to the stage, with a trio of Aurors on every side, including a pair behind the curtain, perfectly positioned to strike any attackers. Amelia approached the stage to give her speech.

"I must say it is an honor to be named the new Minister of Magic, a position that has had some good and some bad, but right now we are in a time of war and public image should be the least of our concerns," said Minister Bones in a loud, but firm voice. "Lord Voldemort has returned and I have no doubt that some of you in attendance have been affected by his vile ways. Let me make one thing perfectly clear, no matter what your views on blood purity or anything else is, Voldemort does not represent your best interests. He only represents the interest of one person. It is the same person that his interests have always represented and the same person his interests will represent until the day he dies. That person is and

always will be Voldemort and you should not be entranced by what he can offer, because that offer in reality is nothing!"

A loud cheer echoed throughout the converted courtroom.

"I plan to restore full funding and support to the Auror Department, they are the most valuable resource we have in the conflict with Voldemort and I encourage you all to speak his name," said Minister Bones. "He thrives on one weapon and that is fear. The recent article in the Daily Prophet has removed part of the veil of uncertainty from over him but that may mean he is desperate now more than ever. Any suspicious activity should be reported to the Ministry of Magic immediately. It is our hope that we round up all of his supporters and bring them to justice. I'm encouraging the Wizengamot to vote for stronger security measures around Azkaban, as with the two previous breakouts and the recent defection of the Dementors, we don't have any measures to hold them for more than days."

"What about Downfall?" asked someone from the crowd and right there, interest in the crowd perked up. This was an answer that many of them wanted to hear.

"I will do all I can to make sure this situation is dealt with properly," said Bones who was very conflicted. She would sooner let Downfall just run wild on the Death Eaters, but she had to maintain order as Minister of Magic. "This is a tricky one to deal with, as so far, the majority of Downfall's victims have been convicted Death Eaters and Voldemort's sympathizers. Be that as it may, the Ministry of Magic cannot condone vigilantes, no matter how noble the intentions are. If the Aurors can catch them, the mask will be removed and whoever is prosecuted to the fullest extent of Ministry law. The same thing occurred with Dumbledore and his unauthorized group, it will occur here once again, even though we can all agree that this is the more extreme case."

For the next half hour or so, the new Minister answered questions, mostly given by members of the press who had attended. Several people had filed out by this time as Harry consulted his watch.

“Close to midnight,” said Harry to Ginny, not paying attention to the fact that Narcissa Malfoy had left in a hurry behind his back. “It’s going to be wrapping up soon anyway, I think we’ve stayed long enough as it is, we have other things to do tonight anyway.”

Ginny nodded, as she and Harry discretely left as things were winding down. Neville, Luna, Daphne, and Susan had already said their goodbyes and were since gone. All of the guests who wore dark marks had gone, most likely owing up to the fact that the attack was a futile gambit. While the actual event had only been a few hours, it seemed like forever but at least they had a Minister of Magic.

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Voldemort walked into the Bones Estate, carefully slipping inside. As his contact indicated, the protections had gone down shortly before midnight. There were no Aurors on the premises, as all of them were needed when Bones had been named Minister of Magic. As if Voldemort would even attack such a public affair. Voldemort walked inside, he would be waiting for Amelia Bones in her sitting room, the moment she arrived. He would make her time as Minister of Magic rather short.

“Right on time, Riddle,” said a ghostly voice and Voldemort spun around, to see a figure swoop in on a broomstick, throwing a skin shredding curse at him, which he ducked. He turned around to see the masked face of a recent thorn in his side.

“Downfall,” said Voldemort softly, as he dodged another curse before he fired one of his own, which was blocked. “Perhaps you should remove the mask so we can face each other properly like men.”

“Defeat me and I will remove it but I should warn you of one thing,” said Downfall icily as the figure blasted several balls of green flames that Voldemort had to block with a shield of ice as Downfall circled the Dark Lord, it was almost inhuman how fast Voldemort was circled on that broom, before the masked face looked down at Voldemort, before responding with a voice full of contempt. “I don’t plan on losing to the filthy bastard son of a squib and a Muggle.”

And there's Chapter...Thirty One? Damn.

Downfall, I'm enjoying reading the theories of who is under the mask. I'm not going to say anything one way or another. You'll know when the mask comes off, that's all I'm saying. Obviously I've planted hints for many people within the last two chapters and there is more to come.

The point about the Resurrection Stone, believe me, it's going somewhere and when Harry uses it, more information will come out that will make Harry and Ginny hate Dumbledore even more than they already do.

Next Chapter, Downfall against Voldemort and we wrap up the rest of the summer, before we head onto Hogwarts for the sixth year.

Chapter Thirty Two: Confusion

Voldemort swiftly blocked another attempted attack that would have burned most of the flesh off of his body. Two more attacks and Downfall circled Voldemort. Voldemort looked up, with anger and irritation, as he watched his adversary move from one location to another.

“Come down here and fight me straight up, unless you’re a coward hiding behind that mask,” hissed Voldemort with a small amount of irritation present in his voice.

“So says the man who goes to insane lengths to hide his heritage,” answered Downfall cruelly as an Incendio Bomb was thrown to the ground right towards Voldemort. An explosion released a blast of fire, which Voldemort promptly froze in an instant. Several pieces of ice dropped to the ground as Voldemort sent two attacks that were deflected. One broke a window and the other blasted an entire shelf. “I wear a mask to protect those who are close to me from getting harmed. You are a true coward, as you wear the mask to hide what you really are, but no amount of deception will hide that you are nothing but the product of two individuals who have never held a wand in their life.”

“Drop the charade, Potter,” stated Voldemort coldly, as he attempted to snap the broom in half and hopefully some bones, but Downfall dodged that attack once again. “I know you’re under the mask and I will rip it off.”

Downfall refused to respond, but instead sent several miniature blasts of green fire at Voldemort. The Dark Lord dodged the attacks, putting up as shield of ice, that melted on impact but also blocked Voldemort’s flesh from being burned off his body. A snap of a coil and a razor wire cocoon soared towards Voldemort. Voldemort turned, before he disappeared right to the side. The wire wrapped around a chair, slicing into it. The stuffing came out of the chair and Voldemort remained on his feet.

“AVADA KEDAVRA!” shouted Voldemort, he would kill Downfall first and remove the mask. Unfortunately, the blast of green light had

missed Downfall. A swerve to the right and Downfall was right behind Voldemort. A conjured metal spike was aimed towards Voldemort's skull. Voldemort blasted the spike into dust, before more blasts of green fire were aimed towards Voldemort. The entire sitting room was engulfed in flames, but Voldemort refused to move an inch, rather attempted to destroy the broomstick right from underneath Downfall, but that attack was avoided.

"All those attacks at me, and you have not come close to even touching me," said Downfall crudely as flesh tearing hex was avoided. Another spell was dodged by Downfall and a loud magically created sonic blast flew towards Voldemort. The Dark Lord was caught off guard with the loud, painful sounds for a few seconds, but Voldemort fought through with a sickening yellow spell. Downfall dodged and the spell blew a large hole into the wall. A pair of Incendio bombs dropped to the ground and in a blink of an eye, they spontaneously combusted, causing red hot flames to move towards Voldemort. Two equally dangerous spells were shot towards each other simultaneously. Both spells connected with each other and bounced off of each other.

A loud explosion rattled the entire room, causing the ceiling above them to crumble. Voldemort refused to allow a little thing like the room caving in to stop him, as another skin shredding curse was aimed towards his adversary. Downfall blasted a piece of debris towards Voldemort, but the debris was blasted in half, causing smoke and dust to rise into the air. Voldemort turned around and another attack was blocked, before an organ explosion curse spiraled in the air towards Downfall.

"Not good enough, you'll never be good enough, you filthy bastard, son of a squib, son of a Muggle!" taunted Downfall as each and every spell was dodged around, with Voldemort getting more and more frustrated. "You have a bit more talent than your followers I had to put down, but that doesn't really matter at all because all of cowardly Death Eaters are exactly the same. Weak and unable to fight someone who is willing to call your bluff. I can see it in your eyes, Riddle, you fear me, because you don't know me."

"I know it's you Potter and I will rip out your tongue, boy!" shouted Voldemort as it was a wonder that the room had not caved in as of yet. Two more high power spells met in mid air and they blasted backwards. It was a wonder Downfall had not fallen off of the broom as Voldemort put up a shield, before another spell was sent right at the masked figure. A corkscrew of deadly looking orange light that seemed to heat up the room was repelled right back at Voldemort. "Enough of these games, Potter."

"Are you certain?" asked Downfall coldly. "Or are you trying to grip onto a familiar face to hide your fears beneath a mask? Not everything is as easily explained as your motivations Riddle. You are out for many things. Power for yourself. Revenge against those who you think wronged you. Murder of those who oppose you, who don't fear you, I don't fear you, I fear no one. Not you, not, now, not ever!"

More spells blasted, as the entire sitting room rocked, as the fireplace was blown. As long as Downfall was on that room, Voldemort was forced to admit that the fight would be one of the toughest he had ever encountered. Still, Lord Voldemort did not become the powerful wizard he was by giving up, he kept at the fight, he refused to bow down to someone who he felt was not his superior. Another sonic vibration curse rattled the room and the roof had started to cave in places, the magic holding up the building had just barely kept the destruction at bay.

"Sooner or later, your blood will be spilled all over the Wizarding World and once you die, no one will care, the blood traitors will just move onto the next source of power to leach off of," taunted Downfall as a poison dart impacted Voldemort right in the spine. His own unique body had rendered him mostly immune to the majority of poisons, but he still felt a severe discomfort. "All your work, will be just a footnote, once you are in the grave and no one will even be bothered enough to even spit on your grave, Riddle."

"CRUCIO!" cried Voldemort but Downfall managed to dodge both that and some falling debris by an incredible maneuver, that also allowed the masked figure to pull off a curse that would have struck Voldemort right in the base of his neck, had he not had the presence of mind to move.

"Time to bow to death, Riddle," replied Downfall coldly, as another spell, this time a multi colored light drove towards Voldemort. Voldemort was knocked off guard but still the crafty dark wizard had the ability to shift through the majority of the impact of the spell. Voldemort refused to give in, to yield even for one second and Downfall also matched Voldemort's ability spell for spell.

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Amelia returned outside of her home, she just wanted to get in bed, but a pair of loud explosions caused her to freeze immediately. More loud explosions followed by loud voices. While she could not quite make out what was being said, the Minister of Magic could tell there was an intense fight going on in her house. She eyed down the pathway, there appeared to be no one outside. Still, she refused to let her guard down for one minute, but if it was who she thought it was, she would need to summon the Aurors immediately.

"Scrimgeour, I fear that Voldemort has come after us and I think it's safe to say that our illusive vigilante has also showed up, bring as many Aurors as you can wangle up as soon as possible, right now if we're lucky, both of them are spent from attacking each other and will be easy to take out," said Amelia even though she doubted very much that there was a high possibility that either Downfall or Voldemort could be captured by anything less than an army of hundreds. Still if there was any chance, she was willing to take advantage of the situation if the opportunity should present itself.

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"Not going to bend yet, Riddle," said Downfall in an amused voice, as a blast had knocked Voldemort off balance. It took the dark wizard a few seconds to realize that Downfall blasted right towards him on a broomstick. This attack caught Voldemort off guard and for a briefest of seconds, he felt like a deer in the headlights.

Downfall crashed right into Voldemort, the impact causing Voldemort's wand to fly from his hand and another crash send Voldemort right through a wall into a hallway area. It appeared that

flying straight through the wall had no effect on Downfall and Voldemort got to his feet, ignoring the cuts, bruises, and broken bones he suffered, as he was right back on his feet, only to get thick cords blasted. Voldemort sliced the cords, which in hindsight was a mistake. They grew, like snakes, before they wrapped around his legs, arms, and throat. Downfall watched as a yellow spell caught Voldemort right in the eyes. A loud, inhumane shriek and Voldemort saw spots as he felt a rattling sensation on the inside of his head.

“ENOUGH!” shouted Voldemort, as he broke free from his containment, gasping for air and he could just barely see the figure throw another object down at him, causing it to burst into flames. He was shielded from the fire and Downfall circled him, almost like a shark circling its prey. Voldemort stood, almost daring Downfall to strike, to make the next move.

Several loud pops and the door burst open, with several Aurors, who had their wands pointed at the two figures.

“Ministry of Magic Aurors, place your wands on the ground where we can see them or we will use force!” shouted Scrimgeour, who was rather aware how absurd this sounded when facing Lord Voldemort and this Downfall person. “Wands down and hands up where we can see them, you are under arrest.”

Voldemort just looked at the Aurors for about ten seconds, before he responded with a round of cold laughter. Several Aurors took a step back in fear, seeing Voldemort laughing at them was a sight, Downfall just sat on them from atop of the broomstick, not even bothering to show any emotion or movement, not that there would be any emotion to be shown beneath that mask.

“Fools, defying Lord Voldemort, I trust we will have to continue this encounter at another time,” said Voldemort softly as he looked up at Downfall, before he turned to the Aurors and sent a blast of black light. The Aurors returned fire but Voldemort had disappeared before they could even get close to getting a spell. They turned their attention to Downfall but a pellet dropped to the ground. It released a cloud of blue smoke and the Aurors moved around, coughing.

“He went through the window!” shouted Dawlish as he heard a crash, as Downfall had obviously crashed the broomstick through the window. Several Aurors moved, choking on the smoke but once they had managed to reach the window, Downfall had already vanished.

Amelia looked around, as the Aurors managed to siphon the smoke around, as she realized how close she could have become to being the shortest reigned Ministry of Magic in history. Voldemort was waiting to kill her but Downfall was waiting to kill Voldemort. It was frustrating having to uphold the law sometimes and also there would need to be a lot of repair work after the battle.

“Keep around the perimeter,” ordered Scrimgeour gruffly to a group of Aurors. “If anyone comes on this property that shouldn’t be, I don’t care if it’s a cat, I want you to stun it on sight.”

The Aurors nodded, as Amelia surveyed the damage. It could have been much worse had she not summoned the Aurors when she did, but that did not mean there was a lot of work ahead of her. It was just lucky that no was injured, as this entire incident could have been entirely worse.

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“The Dark Lord was in a foul mood tonight, it is quite lucky others managed to absorb the brunt of his frustration,” remarked Snape as he reported to Dumbledore, who sat, he seemed rather preoccupied for some reason. “He met Downfall and I have never seen the Dark Lord look more shaken. Granted, I doubt I’ve ever seen him shaken whatsoever.”

“This Downfall may pose an unintentional cog in the plans for the future,” responded Dumbledore fearfully, it was a chaotic force that he had not intended. “Any hint who is under the mask.”

“Not at the slightest,” responded Snape, who decided not to mention the Dark Lord’s insane theory that Potter was underneath the mask. For one, Snape hardly believed Potter would be capable of killing anything. He was inept and magically average. Secondly, if he did,

Dumbledore would not even entertain the notion for even the briefest of instances. "What of our plans?"

"They remain the same, but I just hope whomever is under that mask is revealed, because its setting a dangerous precedent for the world, more people may follow the lead of our vigilante problem, killing those, and it may go beyond Death Eaters, as the Dursleys have proven," said Dumbledore.

"To be fair, many would consider the Dursleys to be on that level, after all of the rumors about their treatment of Potter," said Snape.

"Far from rumors, Severus, the Dursleys mistreated Harry, but I would have stepped in had their treatment had gone too far," said Dumbledore.

"How far is too far, Dumbledore?" asked Snape, who no matter how much he hated Potter, was ill at the thought that Dumbledore would condone such behavior against a child.

"It did not reach that point Severus, so there is no need to worry, all you need to know is I will inform Harry of everything that he needs to know," said Dumbledore and once again, Snape understood that to mean Dumbledore was going to tell the boy a rather condensed version, while allowing him to stumble across the information that he needed on his own. "I do hope the Ministry of Magic does find this Downfall, because despite their crimes, murder is never an option. It just sets a dangerous standard."

Snape just nodded, but quite frankly he did not agree. Dumbledore was playing with an extraordinary amount of fire here and he may in fact get burned. In fact, Snape was a bit unnerved at this Downfall. He was at a loss at who could be behind it. At first he suspected some disgruntled Death Eater, who had read the article that Rita Skeeter had written, uncovering the past of Voldemort. It made perfect sense, but would any Death Eater be brave enough to defy the Dark Lord? Snape had no answer to that.

"I am very close to locating Horace, I think I might have cornered him at last," said Dumbledore, abruptly changing the subject.

“Good,” said Snape, who had very little patience these days to teach such a delicate art like Potions to students that were getting more and more ignorant to the more subtle aspects of the brewing each and every year. Defense Against the Dark Arts was the position he should have gotten fifteen years ago, but Dumbledore had refused to give it to him, giving him a laundry list of excuses. Years ago when Lockhart got the job, Snape nearly quit out of protest, but somehow, Dumbledore managed to talk him out of it, giving him a not so subtle reminder of who kept him out of Azkaban.

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Hermione gave her head a small shake, she had been asleep all night but her body still felt sore. She put it down to an after effect of the potion that was supposed to keep her mind from falling back to the darkness, along with the random spots in her memory that were blank. Harry did warn her that it could be a potential side effect, short term memory loss, but the alternative was even worse. Hermione managed to read the literature on the disease she had finally and the dark arts were slowly poisoning both her body and her mind. In another year, she would be either insane and her body would give out. As smart as she was, she only had a moderate amount of magical ability. To this day, Hermione still wondered what she was thinking when she thought about learning the dark arts and being blinded by jealousy was the painful answer.

She looked over to the mirror on her dresser, looking at her disfigured face. Several non descript, scars lined her face and a larger scar, right around the area of her right eye, in the shape of a crooked, crude shape that vaguely resembled a “D”. The D represented her personal grade of how she treated Harry and Ginny, her only true friends, over the past year and a half, dreadful. Her behavior was absolutely dreadful.

Quite frankly, she dreaded going back to Hogwarts, but the law had prohibited her from having any say, otherwise her parents would be hauled to Azkaban. That was something that Hermione did not want, her parents and her had just began to mend the fences after being almost total strangers recently. It would hurt to lose them again.

A tapping on the window had caused Hermione to jump. It could not have been the results from her exams. She had just completed them on Friday and would not get them until the middle of August. Hermione walked forward, before she opened a window to see the owl carrying the Daily Prophet. That was the only mail she received, except for the constant friendly reminders from Harry to take her potions. Hermione took the copy of the Daily Prophet, before the headline on the front page had caught her eye.

Downfall and He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named Battle at Residence of Minister of Magic, Destroying Sitting Room and Hallway.

Hermione began to read through the paper, that detailed the scene and there were pictures. It looked like a crime scene. There was another smaller article, detailing several Death Eaters, no one too high up, unfortunately, had met their end. Hermione gave a smile at what she was reading. Downfall was quite the enigma it seemed but whoever it was, they were doing good, something that Hermione wished she would be able to do. She placed down the paper on the bed, before she turned to the mirror.

Instead of Hermione's reflection staring back at her, there was the image of Downfall, exactly how the newspapers described him or her. Hermione blinked and seconds later, the image in the mirror was her own reflection. She watched seconds later, as if numb in shock to what she saw.

"Hermione, breakfast!" shouted Jean Granger from the stairs which brought Hermione out of her transfixed state at staring at herself in the mirror and allowed her to shake her head to clear the cobwebs.

"No that's silly," muttered Hermione, after she was visited with an insane thought that she quickly discounted. She was imagining things, because she was hungry. She moved from her room, careful not to glance at any reflective surfaces as she made her way down to eat breakfast, trying to put these strange theories out of her head.

Harry bent over his notes, as Ginny was curled up right next to him in the chair, half asleep, her head resting gently on Harry's shoulder. He had come so close to making a breakthrough on his Dementor research that he had to complete it today. Together, they had made a lot of progress on a rather strange and foreign branch of magic to most. Ginny's presence was a comfort to him as usual but he must not get distracted, as she shifted closer to him.

Harry looked at the paper, double checking his calculations. It was a chore in frustration reworking the Patronus Charm into something that would be more effective against Dementors but now he knew he had the perfect weapon to control them.

"Ginny, I've done it," said Harry triumphantly, and Ginny turned to him with a smile, she was very proud of what they had done together, even though the majority of the really specific calculations.

"Great Harry," said Ginny with a pleased smile, as she stroked Harry's hair while giving him an encouraging smile. "I know you could do it."

"Remember Ginny, there were a few calculations that I wouldn't have gotten without your help, so we both did it, but now unfortunately, we need to test it on an actual Dementor," said Harry, as Ginny curled up into his lap.

"One step at a time Harry, we'll get it, just like Fred and George think they'll have something that will take down the giants pretty soon," said Ginny with a confident smile. "Everything is going perfectly."

"Yes," said Harry as he looked into her chocolate brown eyes, so full of intensity, determination, and love towards him. Her beauty was totally obvious when she was confident. "Perfectly, just like how we compliment each other."

Ginny turned, as she draped herself over Harry, before they began to kiss intensely in front of the fire. Before his mind completely was distracted, Harry made sure that the doors were completely locked so no one could disturb their fun. Even if they did this every day, it would never get old, as Harry's hands maneuvered themselves into Ginny's

shirt as she began to plant kisses down the side of Harry's neck, as her hands proceeded to work their way down his neck. He looked in Ginny's eyes, she clearly liked what he was doing and the soft moan she echoed was confirmation for this. Their clothes were a barrier that they eagerly helped each other remove within a matter of a couple of minutes. Ginny's legs were wrapped tightly around Harry, her body pressed against him as they continued to kiss and they felt warmth, power, and comfort as they continued to go further.

"I love you, Harry," whispered Ginny in his ear as she looked into those eyes, that intoxicated her, made her want to do things that her mother would surely not approve of with Harry.

"I love you too, Ginny," replied Harry, as he look at Ginny, her body was absolutely perfect, to go along with her mind and personality. If he lived to be a thousand, he would never find another girl like that, not that he would want to try when he already had Ginny. One more look at each other showed that they could not contain themselves any longer.

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Horace Slughorn sighed, as he made his way into the sitting room of the house that he had borrowed from a family of Muggles that were out of town. For the past couple of months, both He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named and Dumbledore had been tailing him, both after his services and quite frankly, Horace wanted to keep a low profile until this entire thing blew over. He remembered Tom Riddle as a student, it was hard to believe that charming young man had turned into a raving, murderous, lunatic, but power did get to the best of them. Horace liked influence with those in high places, rather than having the power himself, it kept him humble and at the same time, able to call in favors to get him out of tight fixes.

"Good evening, Horace," said the calm voice of Albus Dumbledore, which caused him to wince. He was hoping to avoid this but yet Dumbledore stood there, with Minerva McGonagall. "I trust you are well."

“Well as one could be in this day and age, Albus,” said Slughorn coolly, he was not going to fall into one of Dumbledore’s little traps and do something he’ll regret later.

“Albus has asked me to offer you a position as the Potions Professor at Hogwarts,” said Minerva calmly. “We feel that we must move Severus to the Defense Against the Dark Arts position and you are the most qualified candidate for the job once again.”

“I thank you for your offer, but I’m afraid I’m going to have to decline it,” said Horace firmly. “Severus should remain in the Potions position, he is rather qualified for the job.”

Horace paused, truth was that Severus was not his intended successor when he retired, he really wanted Lily to take the job, but everyone knew what happened there. Beside, he knew that Severus had his heart set on becoming the teacher for the Defense Against the Dark Arts and had recommended him to Dumbledore, once it was clear that he had a change of heart of his Death Eater activities. Still, Dumbledore refused, giving Severus the job as Potions Professor and hired a laundry list of horrid Defense Against the Dark Arts teachers, with a few gems, but mostly useless.

“Now Horace, I’m sure you can’t be happy fleeing from Death Eaters every waking moment of your life,” said Dumbledore calmly, as he wished Harry was here to help convince Horace to take the job, but Sirius had put his foot down about Dumbledore taking Harry anywhere during the summer and threatened to contact the Ministry if Dumbledore did not leave immediately. Still, the Boy-Who-Lived was a bargaining chip that Dumbledore wished he had.

“It is a chore, but I’ve managed fine, I’ve eluded you for almost two months, Albus,” responded Horace calmly. “The fact is, I have no interest in teaching ever again, when I retired, that was it.”

“Horace, I believe that you would be better served at Hogwarts, where you can be protected, it would be a shame if someone had found you and had kidnapped you,” said Dumbledore.

"Yes, after what happened recently, Hogwarts is really safe," said Horace with a bit of sarcasm evident in his voice. "Underage students being put in a tournament that was supposed to be secure, Basilisks in the wall, Dementors being allowed on the grounds, and nearly sucking the soul out of a minor. It is a wonder you've been kept out of Azkaban for reckless endangerment of minors or should I say a minor. Lily has to be rolling over in grave, both from what you put her son in and her son blindly following you even if it's obvious you don't have his best interests in mind."

"I'm sorry you feel that way Horace, but there is a much bigger picture evident than even you could realize," said Dumbledore and Horace just snorted at that. "I feel it would be in your best interests to come to Hogwarts."

"That very nearly sounds like a threat Dumbledore, perhaps the Ministry of Magic would like to hear about that," said Horace as Minerva looked scandalized. "I think you've confused me with one of your puppets. I wasn't sorted into Slytherin because I look good in the robes."

"Then that is your final answer, Horace," said Dumbledore with a hurt look on his face.

"Yes it is, I don't even know why you're here to begin with, just coming along for the ride I suppose," said Horace. "Last I checked Minerva was the Headmistress and you were a wizard with very above average magical abilities, along with no political power."

"So I guess this means no," said Minerva as she looked at Dumbledore.

"It does, when I retired, I retired, I'm too old for the constant strain of teaching classes and perhaps your forced retirement was a good thing as well Dumbledore," said Horace as he caught a glimpse of the former Headmaster's purple hand.

"Old age is a harsh mistress, but one that I must overcome for a short term," said Dumbledore who had the task of informing Severus that Horace refused to budge and thus he would not get the spot of the

Defense Against the Dark Arts teacher. Once again, he wished he had Harry to help him convince Horace, but Sirius was his legal guardian and thus Dumbledore had no power. Dumbledore felt he was being manipulated by Sirius, on when he could talk to Harry and he hated being manipulated by other people.

There were some days where he wished he had not given Miss Granger that time turner.

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"The Hogwarts Board of Governors will now vote on the Defense Against the Dark Arts teacher," said the leader of the Board as Minerva sat as the Board just looked past her if she was a non entity. "First, the decision has been passed that Harry James Potter is now the High Inquisitor of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry and Ginerva Molly Weasley has been named as his successor as Junior Inquisitor, voted by both the Hogwarts Board of Governors and the majority of prefects."

Minerva was surprised, she had assumed the High Inquisitor position would die when Umbridge was removed but she saw a rather interesting problem. She knew Dumbledore would be thrilled that his two handpicked successors would be in a position of power above everyone else, but it was impossible for Mr. Potter to become High Inquisitor for a reason.

"I beg your pardon for interrupting, but I believe the Hogwarts decrees prohibit anyone who is not a teacher from ascending to the position of Hogwarts High Inquisitor," said Minerva but the looks of all twelve members of the Board of Governors turn to them.

"A matter that can be rectified easily, as we have seen the scores of Mr. Potter's Defense Against the Dark Arts Ordinary Wizarding Level exams and not only has be passed for that level, but for the Nastily Exhausting Wizarding Test Level exams based on his exception performances, with Outstanding and he is more than qualified for the position we will recommend him for," said the lead Governor. "I recommend that Harry Potter is named the new Defense Against the Dark Arts teacher."

All twelve hands rose up and Minerva wondered if the entire Board had gone off the deep end, naming a sixth year as the Defense Against the Dark Arts teacher.

“But, Mr. Potter is a student, it will be impossible to accommodate all of the classes along with his,” said Minerva but the members of the board looked at her calmly.

“That is your problem, Headmistress McGonagall, I trust you will find a way to do so or we will find another Head that will,” said one of the members of the Board humorlessly and Minerva paled, making the schedules was hard enough. She cursed Albus, if it had not been for Crouch masquerading as Moody, the Board would not have taken such a hands-on role regarding Hogwarts. The truth was Harry Potter was not the worst choice, given some of the more recent teachers, such as Umbridge and Lockhart. Still, there was a chance that he would decline the position and she would not have to deal with the nightmare that making the schedule for this year would be.

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“Ah Harry and Ginny we’re glad you could come here on such short notice,” said George as he lead them into their shop.

“Indeed, I’m sure it’s an oversight, but several of our products are missing from our storage, including our failed prototype gloves,” said Fred.

“Now we’re sure it’s not Death Eaters, because of the wards you helped place around the shop,” said George. “Well marked ones anyway.”

“Yes, anyone with a dark mark that tries to enter the shop will get ejected rather painfully, I remember,” said Harry as he looked around. “Are you sure you haven’t missed anything? You do have thousands of products in stock.”

“Perhaps we might have Harry, but this Downfall character, he or she or whatever it is, is using some products that bare a strong resemblance to some of our private stock,” answered Fred.

“Not that we’re saying some of our products going missing and this Downfall are connected, whoever it is could be intelligent enough to construct something like that, because I bet we’re not the first people to come up with these ideas,” added George as he looked at Harry and Ginny. “Still, you two don’t have any ideas, do you?”

“Of course we have ideas,” responded Harry. “But how much of a chance are there that they will be accurate?”

“I don’t think you two have much of anything to worry about, just keep an eye on your backroom more carefully, “ said Ginny. “As you said, you could have misplaced them.”

The twins nodded, but something told them, Harry and Ginny both knew something they were not saying.

“So what do you think about Downfall anyway?” asked George.

“Well, whoever is under the mask, they’re sure getting the attention of Death Eaters and Voldemort himself,” said Harry.

“Yes, after Voldemort met Downfall, the attacks on Minister Bones seemed to go down as well,” remarked Ginny with a smirk. “They still happen, but people are afraid that their downfall might come from around every corner.”

“It could be anyone underneath that mask,” responded Harry casually. “It could be somebody important or a complete nobody.”

“That’s the thing about a mask, it can cover the face of anyone,” said Ginny with a smile. “Any number of people in fact.”

“Don’t worry, if you don’t have a dark mark on your arm, I doubt Downfall is much of a concern to anyone,” responded Harry. “I do thank you from informing me of this and any other odd things you notice, please tell me immediately.”

"Will do Harry," responded George as Fred nodded his head.

"We'll get out of your way then, after all, a profitable joke shop doesn't run itself," responded Harry.

"Too true Harry," said George with a chuckle as he watched Harry and Ginny leave. Both twins noted that neither of them seemed too upset about the potentially missing items, but given all the measures that they took against Death Eaters, it was understandable. Not being on the receiving end of Ginny's temper was not a cause for concern, but rather a cause of celebration.

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Sirius looked at the calendar, a week ago, was Harry's birthday and it was a joyous celebration but today was far from a cause of celebration. This was the anniversary of the day that Remus was bitten by Greyback and thus Remus was in his room, not wanting to be disturbed. Not that Sirius blamed him, the anniversary of something like that was not a day one would look forward to. Also, it was the anniversary of the day that he found out his brother Regulus had betrayed Voldemort and thus was reported to be killed by his followers. The death was so messy that there was never a body found. Sirius remembered it well, it caused his mother to completely snap and go insane, leading to her slow death. She thought of both of her sons as blood traitors for what they did.

Sirius was brought out of his bitter recollections by a surprise gasp, coming from Ginny. Quickly, Sirius stepped forward, to see what was up, before he remembered that Harry would be getting his exam results here before long.

"What's up?" asked Sirius.

"Apparently, based on the results of my OWLs, the Board of Governors is offering me a job as the Defense Against the Dark Arts teacher for next year," said Harry who had hinted that he could do a better job than many of the teachers. It was obvious that the Board

had taken his off handed remarks rather seriously and based on the exam results.

"I guess Slughorn said no," replied Sirius and Harry nodded.

"Guess so, if Harry gets the position, he'll be named the new High Inquisitor and I will get the Junior Inquisitor position," said Ginny as she looked at Harry.

"McGonagall is pretty much Headmistress in name only if that happens," replied Sirius calmly.

"Yes, but we'll let her handle the day to day roles, we'll only step in if necessary, right Ginny?" asked Harry.

"Right Harry, so you're serious, you're going to really do this," said Ginny.

"Teaching Defense up close might give me a good idea of who has potential out of the younger students," offered Harry. "At first, people might think we have too much power, but then it will only be people like Malfoy complaining, so I don't really care about what they think."

"True Harry, it will just bring us one step closer," said Ginny as she looked at the envelope. "The OWLs, do you mind if I..."

"Not at all, in fact I was about ready to do myself," said Harry as he opened the envelope to reveal the greats. He looked over them, Defense Against the Dark Arts, he had managed to receive not only an Outstanding OWL, but also an Outstanding NEWT as well. He had received Outstanding Grades in Charms, Transfiguration, Potions, Herbology, and oddly enough Divination, with Exceeds Expectations with everything else.

"That was great Harry," said Ginny as she hugged Harry and kissed him. "At this rate, you'll be Head Boy no problem come your seventh year."

“Wouldn’t that be a step down at this point?” asked Sirius and the three laughed, it would be so true. “No seriously, you did really good, your parents would be really proud, because I know I am.”

Sirius remembered, as much as he and James goofed off at Hogwarts and did slack off a bit on their regular day to day work, they really cracked down when it came time for the exams that counted. Those were the grades that really mattered and were why they were the considered among the smartest students in that era.

“Thanks Sirius,” said Harry in an appreciative voice, truthfully everything was gong better than he expected. He had only really focused on the subjects that he felt he needed. The fact he got an Outstanding on Divination was a mystery. Even though grades had little to do with his inevitable plans, they did look nice on paper. Ginny gripped his hand and they walked towards the stairs. A quick letter to the Hogwarts Board of Governors was in order and a few other things, but then it would be time for celebration. Not that it would match the fun that Harry and Ginny had on Harry’s birthday, but they could try.

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Rookwood lead a group of Death Eaters to a Muggle village. There was five other than Rookwood in total and it was time to send a message to all those who opposed the Dark Lord. Quite frankly, Rookwood was not afraid of Downfall, whomever it was, they just used smoke and mirrors and luck to get the better of the Death Eaters. The Dark Lord would have killed the meddler if the Aurors had not saved them. Rookwood walked forward, as a couple of the Death Eaters, freshly marked, had looked around.

“Scared of shadows,” said Rookwood in a taunting voice.

“No, I don’t like this, Downfall’s been getting Death Eaters right and left, what if we’re next?” asked one of the Death Eaters.

“Don’t worry, if Downfall comes, I’ll take care of that blood traitor, you can just stand back where it’s safe,” said Rookwood in a condescending voice, who could nearly taste that five thousand galleons the Dark Lord had promised to anyone who could remove

the mask. One of the Death Eaters stepped forward, a bit eagerly as he stepped up what appeared to be a dung bomb lying on the pathway. He shrieked when the bomb lit up, before flames travelled up his legs and began to burn him alive.

"No, he's here, we should get out of here before its too late," said one of the Death Eaters as he watched as another one had fallen to the ground, his head snapped to the side at an awkward angle. The Death Eater in a panic, tried to Disapparate to safety but he screamed as his insides were ripped to shreds, before he dropped to the ground. Blood gushed from his mouth, as he bled to death internally.

"Show yourself, you stinking coward," barked a Death Eater crudely but ropes had wrapped around his arms and legs and he was slammed viciously right through a window, his wand dropping to the ground, glass slicing the back of his neck, blood dripping to the ground at the now obviously empty house. Several loud cracks and another Death Eater fell, every bone in his body snapped, along with most of his vertebrae.

"And then there was only one," responded a ghostly, distorted voice, as Rookwood watched Downfall approach him on foot. Rookwood raised his wand and set a blood red light at his would be attacker. The spell had gone a certain distance before it appeared to strike Downfall to no effect. Rookwood would not be denied, as he fired more spells.

"I don't know who you are or what you are, but the Dark Lord will make you pay," said Rookwood.

"Riddle, I doubt he is intending for us to cross paths after our last encounter," said Downfall softly, razor wire wrapped around Rookwood. He tried to cut loose, but the former Unspeakable found that his wand was removed, as Downfall crushed it in half, before several Incendio bombs were attached to the razor wire as he threatened to crush Rookwood while ripping him to shreds.

"Just what are you, how do you keep finding us?" demanded Rookwood through strained breaths as it was impaled into his chest

hard as the bombs began to heat up around his chest. Either he would be cut to death or spontaneously combust, neither would be pleasant and his last observation was that Downfall had disappeared as quickly as the mysterious figure had appeared.

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Harry put down the Daily Prophet, with a smirk as he read about the latest Death Eaters who had met their downfall. Ginny had just put the finishing touches on her summer homework, with a few weeks to spare. Yesterday was her birthday and Harry had told Ginny he intended to give her the former Dumbledore seat on the Wizengamot. While officially, Ginny could not take the seat until she was of age, unofficially Harry could ask her opinions on certain matters and cast her vote for her. Naturally he would offer no commentary not to sway his girlfriend's decision, but they did tend to have rather similar opinions on most of everything.

"More Dementor attacks today," said Harry. "No matter how much I'm sure of these calculations and once again, your help was appreciated, I'm reluctant to use these spells on the Dementors without asking for another opinion."

"I understand, the last thing you want is a super Dementor who can suck the souls out of anyone who even comes close with a mere gesture," said Ginny with a slight shudder at this thought. "But there is someone who you could ask and you do have the means of doing so. Harry, I know you've been going back and forth about using the Resurrection Stone, but the fact is your mother was a genius in spell creating. If anyone could help you make sure everything is right, it would be her. I mean without her notes, we would not have been able to develop those reusable Portkeys."

"True, they have served us well," answered Harry and besides, there was so much more that he needed to ask his mother. "After all my study, there is no harm in using the Resurrection Stone without the proper precautions"

Harry reached over into his pocket, to remove a box with the stone. Ginny handed him a pair of dragon hide gloves, they had both agreed

it might not be the best idea to touch the stone with bare flesh anyway. Harry slipped the gloves on and then slipped the ring on his finger.

“Three turns clockwise,” said Harry as he took a deep breath, with Ginny grabbing his free hand, to encourage him to do so. In his hand, he turned the stone three times in his hand and waited with baited breath.

The ring began to vibrate in his hand slightly, the sensation that the books had described, so far so good. A bright light rose from the stone on the ring and shot up into the air before it touched down on the ground. Both watched as a young woman of twenty one years of age appeared, with dark red hair and emerald green eyes, the same color of Harry’s appeared, as she turned to them with a smile on her face. She should have just been a black and white image, according to the books, but yet she was in full color and was very close to being solid.

“I think I have some explaining to do,” said the nearly solid form of Lily Potter with a mischievous smile on her face as she looked at the awestruck and confused faces of both Harry and Ginny.

And there is Chapter Thirty Two. A lot of things happened in this chapter that will obviously have impact in many chapters to come. Some obvious, some not so obvious, just stay tuned to see how they all played out.

And one day, we will get back to Hogwarts, perhaps the next chapter, but soon. :)

See you again after a while for what should be an eventful Chapter Thirty Three.

Chapter Thirty Three: Secrets

"Mum?" asked Harry in confusion as he wondered what was going on and the look in Ginny's face showed that she was equally as confused.

"In the flesh," replied Lily with a smile. "Okay, technically not quite, but the fact is I'm more here than anyone else would have been using the Resurrection Stone."

"Okay, I tried to use the Stone to communicate with you, but then you show up, almost completely solid," said Harry as he tried to figure out what was happening.

"Well I'm sure there is a perfectly logical explanation for all of this," responded Ginny as she surveyed Lily who nodded her head.

"There is, Ginny," answered Lily before she took a deep breath, even though technically she did not really have to. "I believe you have a general idea of what happened that night when Voldemort killed James and tried to kill me and you, but failed."

"Wait a minute, he tried to kill you but failed," said Harry as his eyes widened at the implications of what his mother was saying. "You mean you were never killed."

"Well technically my body was killed, so for all intents and purposes I was dead officially but at the same time I'm not," responded Lily who realized exactly how confusing that sound, it was one of those aspects of magic that made no sense whatsoever. "This might not be as easy to explain as I thought it would be. Perhaps it is best if I start at the beginning, the moment where this all began."

Harry and Ginny nodded, before they both made a motion for Lily to continue.

"Well it all started when Dumbledore told us about the Prophecy, just days after you were born," responded Lily. "We fit the qualifications for the prophecy perfectly. Now personally I thought Divination was a load of bunk, but James believed it, Dumbledore believed it, and I

suspected that Voldemort may believe it when he learned of it. While I loved James, there were certain aspects of his personality that really got on my nerves. One of them was his belief that Albus Dumbledore could do no wrong and he would protect us no matter what. I disagreed, but knew if I voiced what I thought, James would mention it to Dumbledore and it's very safe to say that would have caused my life to be monitored even more. As I mentioned in the letter that you found in my vault, I believed that both sides were corrupt. It was two groups of people, depending on their personal philosophies, gravitating towards the person who had the most power and influence in the world. A small minority of people on neither side is caught in the middle. They have to suffer for the never ending game between the two corrupt sides."

"And you were perfectly right, now that Dumbledore has lost his power there aren't as many people who support him," said Harry. "Other than a few diehards who know no other way, everyone has abandoned Dumbledore."

"Indeed and Dumbledore refused to believe he could be mistaken about his opinions for one second, he felt that he had the best interests of the Wizarding World in mind and I believe once he heard that Prophecy, he saw a chance to groom a successor to continue the same corruptive ruling of the alleged light side," said Lily. "I don't even need to remind you of all the games he played regarding the Secret Keeper but Dumbledore isn't the only one who could make plans. You found my work in my vault at Gringotts and might have noticed that something was missing."

"Yes, you started work on trying to find a way to counter the Killing Curse, but didn't finish it in time," said Harry.

"Well I managed to finish it just in time, like a couple of weeks before we went into hiding and Dumbledore performed the Fidelius," answered Lily as the eyes of Harry and Ginny both widened at this surprising piece of news. "The counter is so specific that things need to happen in a certain order that it can rarely be pulled off properly. I doubt it would ever work again and I wouldn't advise doing it anyway, as it requires a temporary sacrifice of a close blood relation to work, with that person being killed first. However, the sacrifice is not dead,

their soul is just removed from their body once the curse hits, like a lesser version of the Dementor's Kiss."

Lily paused as she had the full attention of both teenagers.

"I cast the first part of the spell, that linked my soul to yours, so once I was killed, it would be ejected from my body and placed into yours, in theory, temporarily, but it did not turn out that way, what I did would be considered dark magic because it would be something that very few could grasp," explained Lily. "Still it was perfectly harmless and since the Killing Curse can only kill a body that contains one soul, once Voldemort had thrown the curse at you, it was supposed to bounce back. If Voldemort had not made his Horcruxes, it would have killed him on impact and you would have been unmarked. As it was, his soul was already in shambles and the charm I used caused an unintentional side effect of creating a Horcrux within you. But since that's already been taken care of, I don't think it's something we should dwell on for too long."

"So Voldemort killed you and then threw the killing curse at me, but it backfired, thus throwing him into the existence that he was for thirteen years," summarized Harry and Lily nodded.

"Yes, I should have been brought back to life, I left arrangements to get detailed instructions to Sirius on what I done and how to bring me back to life, with the letter I left in the vault for you as an obvious back up plan, I didn't know if it would be possible for you to bring me back by the time you found that letter, if you did, so that's why I didn't really mention it," said Lily. "Unfortunately, many snags were hit, for one, Sirius went after Peter and was thrown in Azkaban. Dumbledore had his own plans for you and thus did not intervene, even though he knew that Sirius was innocent. The instructions I gave to Sirius were lost. Besides, I'm afraid Dumbledore might have discovered what I did and thus put you with my sister in an attempt to eliminate the possibility that you brought back."

"Wait, he knew there was a chance that you could be brought back and he tried to take it away, by sending me to the Dursleys," said Harry as he looked physically ill at the fact that years of torment could have been averted.

"Well obviously, he did, because he would want to make sure you were ready to follow the path he chose," said Ginny bitterly, as she looked completely angered at what Dumbledore did. "Because if your mother would've survived, it's not like he had any say over what you could do. That's why he worked so hard to make sure you stayed at the Dursleys. He could have gotten Sirius cleared at any time if he wanted to but he didn't."

"Fudge also mentioned that there was a lot of evidence that pointed to my treatment at the Dursleys, but I bet Dumbledore called in some favors to get it buried," added Harry. "I didn't think of this before now, but I would have thought in ten years, someone who have said something was wrong about me."

"They did, I know, people gave you looks but soon after that, I wished I could strangle my sister, I couldn't even believe she would be so petty after all those years, she hasn't gotten over the fact that I got the letter to Hogwarts and she hasn't but her husband might even be worse," said Lily with disgust etched upon her face. "Truly a match made in hell those two and I was forced to watch everything that they put you through, that Dumbledore put you through by putting you there. I couldn't do anything, just watch, as I felt the connection between my soul and the real world weakened, chances of returning to life dwindling. Of course witnessing it and actually living it are two different things, but it still tormented me to see what you were put through every step of the way and not be able to do anything about it."

Harry nodded, he could understand how hard that would be. Ginny held onto his hand.

"Then, you got your hands on the Resurrection Stone, rest assure I have heard the stories about the Deathly Hallows, at least a general overview and learned much more through your eyes, you were very wise in studying it, most people would use the ring in an attempt to bring someone back, which would have never freed me," responded Lily. "What you did ensured that I would come back to an extent, but I'm afraid that Dumbledore might have done too much damage sending you to the Dursleys. His little blood protections corrupted the

magical properties of the charm I used and thus I'm in the state where you see me now."

"So it could be possible," said Harry hopefully.

"That's exactly what I was thinking, but it's not going to be easy given what Dumbledore did," said Ginny and Lily just looked thoughtful.

"Possible yes, but until we have a good idea of how much damage has been done, it's going to be difficult," said Lily in a frustrated voice. "Mostly living through a limbo state, seeing everything, interacting with no one, is not the most pleasant thing in the world, that's when I was hopeful that you would use the Resurrection Stone, it was about the only thing that I thought of which might have done the trick. It did, but not completely, I'm still in limbo."

"Mum if there is anything we can do to bring you completely back, if it's even possible, we will find a way," said Harry.

"That's nice of you Harry, but don't get distracted about what needs to be done, either of you, you've done well so far, but there is still much more work to be done," said Lily who did not want to get anyone's hopes up, especially her own. She had no idea how long she could talk to Harry at one time, working something like the Resurrection Stone required a lot of concentration and was draining to keep up after an amount of time. There was one thing that might be able to perform the countercharm, despite what Dumbledore did, but she would not voice it out loud. "Besides this is a much better state than I've been in over the last fifteen years. I can talk to you two and I don't have to sit back, observing everything."

"So everything we have done so far is about what you had meant in your letter," said Harry who could not help voicing a concern that he had.

"It's perfect, about what I would done if I had been in your position, I just wish someone had been done sooner," said Lily. "If I would have tried it, I'm afraid I would have been silenced before I even got one foot inside the Ministry. Your fame, no matter how disgusting it is that most people see you only for that, does have its benefits and the

Wizarding World is full of sheep. The fact that you both have Hogwarts pretty much in the palm of your hand, shows this but there is just one thing that concerns me. I'm sure you've overlooked it."

"That's right, the curse on the Defense Against the Dark Arts position, in the excitement we nearly forgot about it," said Ginny and Harry nodded, before a smirk appeared on his face.

"This is going to be like me summoning the golden egg, a completely obvious solution that Dumbledore or anyone else in the past forty or so years would have never come up with," remarked Harry, as a plan was beginning to form in his head. "As the Hogwarts High Inquisitor, I'm afraid I'm going to have to eliminate the subject of Defense Against the Dark Arts for the high rate of fatality of the teachers in the subjects. And, I will replace it with a new subject, called Defensive Magic, that will teach how to defend from all types of magic, not just what is officially named the dark arts, a position that has no curse on it I might add."

"Harry, that's brilliant!" cried Ginny, as she pressed her lips against Harry's as the two kissed passionately before they broke apart when they realized Lily was still there.

"No, don't mind me, take your time," said Lily with a smile. "That is pretty good Harry, someone should have thought about it years ago, but let's say Voldemort tries to curse the new class. What then?"

"I've got a plan for that of course," answered Harry. "Voldemort did manage to use rather powerful dark magic to curse the position the first time. He bound the position to himself and if anyone who wasn't him taught the class, they would suffer a horrible misfortune. Some of them fatal, some not, but they would not last a year. For the new class, I can do the same thing but remove the curse when I'm ready to move on to better things."

"Glad you inherited my sense of logic Harry," replied Lily as she turned them, before a serious look on her face. "Now, that I've explained the best I can, you had some notes about modifications to the Patronus Charm that you wanted to me to look at. Even though I

saw what you were doing, I didn't have that much of a chance to look over anything in detail"

"Right, of course, here are all of my notes," said Harry as he pushed the notes over, as Lily walked over, proving that she was not completely solid, as her hand passed through the paper, as she steadied it.

"Right, that's actually good for someone who has never had any experience in modifying spells before, especially since you had no prior work to go off of," responded Lily as she looked over the notes, trying to find any flaws but there were none she could see. "The problem is, the spell is just a super accelerated Patronus Charm. In the hands of a powerful witch and wizard, you've found a way that might weaken the Dementors enough that they can be killed."

"You know I was going for controlling them, but killing them would work just as well," said Harry.

"Yes, with Dementors, as long as we find some way to make them less of a threat, we're not too picky," answered Ginny.

"I'd say keep these notes in tact, but if we work from certain angles, there might be a way to do what you intended them," said Lily thoughtfully, as if she was going over something mentally as quickly as possible before her eyes brightened. "Yes, if you modify a few aspects, add a couple of things, it might work, but without an actual Dementor here, it's really hit and miss what you can do."

"That's what I was afraid of," responded Harry.

"Still, I think we can do it, it just will take a lot of time, a lot of patience, and a lot of luck," answered Lily as the three looked over the spell line by line, trying to figure out how to find a way to control Dementors.

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Draco Malfoy was in a foul mood for a number of reasons. One of those reasons was that despite his pleading, his father had forbidden him to join the ranks of the Dark Lord until he became of age next

year. Draco felt he could be a valuable asset to the Dark Lord's cause, he could help put the filthy Mudbloods and blood traitors in their place. Draco refused to believe the slanderous lies that the Daily Prophet had written about the Dark Lord. He was a powerful wizard. He could not have been the product of a love potion induced romance of a squib and Muggle. It disgusted Draco that many people, including his own mother had looked at the Dark Lord in a completely different light. Even his father had not praised the Dark Lord and seemed to be rather distant towards the cause. On the other hand, Draco would not let a few slanders about the Dark Lord's character blind him towards the cause of putting all the Mudbloods and blood traitors in their place.

Another thing that annoyed him was Potter had been promoted to the role of High Inquisitor of Hogwarts. Dumbledore's influence still polluted the once noble halls of Hogwarts, allowing his little golden boy. The Slytherins would be mistreated as they always were. Potter and his little girlfriend would make sure of that as they worshipped the ground that Dumbledore walked on. Only a small group of blood traitors like Greengrass would ever dare take on Potter's side, they would pay once the Dark Lord had taken over. The fact that Potter had gotten the Defense Against the Dark Arts position or rather Defensive Magic, position had really burned Draco. Precious Potter, the Scar headed Boy Wonder always got whatever he wanted and the real people with proper wizard feeling got shunted off to the side. The Dark Lord would change that.

Draco scowled as he read the Daily Prophet. That they talked about another attack by the mysterious Downfall. Anyone with half of a brain could have figured out it was Potter; he was the only one arrogant enough to dare defy the Dark Lord like that. Draco looked forward to the day that Potter, Downfall, whoever was exposed as the fraud they are.

"Stupid blood traitors," grumbled Draco as he saw an act that was being moved through the Wizengamot that would offer sever fines for discriminatory behavior based on blood type. It was just a disaster waiting to happen; some Mudblood could cry discrimination and could drain a respected pureblood of all of their money. Also there was

more talk about funding for Aurors being increased, but it was a moot point as the Ministry Aurors were useless anyway.

“Draco, we’re going to Diagon Alley, be down in five minutes,” said his mother’s voice from at the bottom of the stairs and Draco sighed, he was old enough to go by himself, but his mother insisted on treating him like a child and accompanying him to do his school shopping. She always embarrassed him when she tried to pick out dress robes. Still, it was less than a year before he became of age and until then Draco bit his tongue. He would become one of the Dark Lord’s most valued followers, he was a Malfoy, he deserved nothing less.

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Ron Weasley walked into the kitchen at the Burrow in a distracted state. So far this summer, he had sent Hermione three letters, each of them going unanswered. He did not really get it, he stood by Hermione through her toughest times, even when she treated him like something she scraped off of the bottom of the shoe. Ron was afraid to say anything to anyone else, because he was not sure if that curse that Hermione put on him all those months ago was still working. Until he knew, even he would not be foolish enough to try and tempt fate.

He also was steamed because once again Harry had gotten something handed to him because of his fame. The fact that he was the best in Defense Against the Dark Arts in the entire year or even the whole school did not really matter, it was absurd that he got a teaching position when he was a student. Ron assumed that no one ever got a Hogwarts teaching position when they were still a student. Not that he knew, he would have to ask Hermione, when he managed to corner her and get her to speak to speak to him. He walked up to his room, to send one more letter, hoping that this time he could reach out to Hermione, convince her to write back and perhaps try to find out whether or not she could lift that curse that she put on him.

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"My Lord, I thank you for the audience you have given me today," said Fenrir Greyback as he almost licked his lips at the thought of serving Lord Voldemort.

"Your talents may be needed Fenrir, to solve a rather posing problem," said Voldemort calmly, as he reached down before he procured a vial of a crimson red potion. "This potion is the first batch of a solution that will allow you to transform without the aid of a full moon. It's untested, but Severus has assured me it will do the job and he knows better to lie after his last failure."

Greyback's eyes lit up with glee, at the thought of causing mayhem in his werewolf form more than once a month and reached forward but Voldemort held the potion out of the werewolf's reach.

"Not so fast, this is a privilege that will be earned, not just given without just cause," said Voldemort softly, waving the vial in front of Greyback's face, taunting him with the prospect.

"Tell me what to down, my Lord, I'll do it, I'll do anything to get that vial," said Greyback as eyed the vial greedily, with a hunger in his eyes. "Who do you want me to kill? Just say the word and I'll snap anyone's neck. Dumbledore? Potter? Bones? Just say it, my Lord."

"Downfall has been a thorn in the side of my Death Eaters for too long, I want whomever it is under that mask eliminated," said Voldemort calmly. "Five thousand Galleons is not enough for my Death Eaters to maintain some level of competence but I believe if anyone could tear off that mask it will be you Fenrir."

"Downfall, delicious, I've always wanted to take a taste of who is under that mask," said Greyback as the werewolf licked his lip. "Their pain will be my pleasure. But wait, my Lord, how do I find out where this Downfall is?"

"Wherever my Death Eaters conduct business, you will find Downfall, Knockturn Alley, the Hog's Head, in fact, I will leave some bait to lure Downfall to that particular location on the next full moon, it's up to you to be in position to eliminate him but do try and leave his face intact, as I wish to peak under the hood, to confirm my suspicions on whom

is under the mask,” ordered Voldemort. “If you wish to rip off Downfall’s head, then feel free, but I need to see the face.”

“And you will, my Lord,” responded Greyback hungrily as he looked over the Dark Lord and eyed the potion.

“Eliminate Downfall and this vial is yours to cause any mayhem you wish, fail and I doubt I even need to spell out what will happen,” said Voldemort in a deadly voice and Greyback shook his head, as the werewolf backed off. Still, he could not wait to taste the blood of Downfall on his lips, the flesh on his teeth. Greyback was positively pleased with the fact that the Dark Lord trusted him with this mission.

Voldemort sat. It would be a true test of the abilities of his enemy. It should be interesting to see whether or not Potter could fend off a fully transformed werewolf. He looked forward to standing victorious over the scraps. And if Greyback failed, it was no loss. He had already secured the support of the majority of the werewolves to begin with and there were many other willing test subjects for forced transformation motion. He had scaled back on his attempts to assassinate the Minister recently, to allow her to fall into a false sense of security and then Voldemort would have her where he wanted her.

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The summer seemed to go by rather fast as before everyone knew it. They were back on the Hogwarts Express, ready for another year at Hogwarts.

After a prefect meeting, Harry and Ginny walked into the compartment, hand in hand, with Daphne and Susan walking closely behind. The new prefects for this year were all in the D.A. the previous year. Harry smiled as he realized how nicely that worked out. Malfoy had loudly complained about Potter getting everything handed to him but Harry just ignored him. The simple reason was that Malfoy was nothing but a buffoon full of hot air. He had delusions that he was something special, but he was kind of pathetic. Harry might have felt sorry for him, if he was not too busy laughing.

“Back so soon?” asked Luna as she sat with Neville in the compartment, as the four prefects walked inside. Luna had practically begged Harry to do everything in his power to make sure she was not made a prefect, something about needing more time to focus on her exams this year. Harry decided to agree with her request, besides it did give him the perfect opportunity to show that he was not biased towards his friends, even though that was one hundred percent the case. Malfoy’s whining was spot on, not that it would have done him much good. Harry looked forward to seeing Snape this year for once, as he could not wait to see the look on his face when Harry had gotten the job he wanted.

“Yes, it just was more of the same, going over rules, not like the big overhaul of last year,” replied Ginny.

“So Defensive Magic Harry?” asked Daphne. “I think we’re all interested in knowing the reason for the class change.”

“Well, it’s not really rocket science, it’s just that why should the dark arts be the only thing defended against?” asked Harry.

“You know, that’s a good point, it is really short sighted to teach people to defend against only the dark arts,” commented Luna. “Seemingly harmless Transfiguration and Charms spells can be used in the wrong hands.”

“And we can convince more people that it’s not the magic, it’s the intent of it,” added Neville.

“That and we can recruit even more people into the D.A., in class, I have to stick to official Ministry approved methods, even though I’m going to push the limits as far as I’m allowed unlike Umbridge,” said Harry. “And I think I’ll be allowed a bit more room than anyone else, my scar does have certain privileges and there was a lot of angry letters being written to the Board of Governors by parents, who were none too pleased with Umbridge’s teaching methods, especially when it was revealed that Voldemort had returned.”

Harry looked, realizing how carefully he maneuvered, so that all of the heat went on the people who were in charge of the Ministry and

few, if any, realized that Harry had played a large part of suppressing the return of Voldemort for a year. It was just a part of his plan to ruin Dumbledore and Fudge was outliving his usefulness once Harry had managed to gather his own supporters within the Ministry. The group had talked for a few more minutes about their plans for the D.A. before Ginny looked at the door. The monitoring spell they had put on the door had went off, revealing that someone was approaching.

"Someone's coming, be on alert," said Ginny and the door opened to reveal Hermione Granger. Her face was still lined with scars, as she held her bag nervously.

"Hi, Harry, Ginny," replied Hermione in a nearly monotonous tone of voice as she looked at them, looking past the others, almost as if she was unaware that they were there. "Mind if I sit in here, over there out of your way, I won't get in your way, just that...everywhere else is full."

Obviously, everywhere else was not full, but everyone else had still hated her for what she did. They also pointed to the scars on her face and laughed at her, not that she minded, Hermione felt she deserved everything she got.

"Yes, Hermione, if everywhere else is full, you may sit down, there's a seat right over there," replied Harry calmly, almost out of pity, as Hermione walked over, apparently oblivious to the cold stares that Neville, Luna, Susan, and Daphne were giving her. Harry watched Hermione sit down, he knew he could never trust her again, but since she had her uses, he would give her another chance. If she even came close to reverting back to her old ways, Harry came to the conclusion that he would have to do what was necessary to put Hermione out of her misery.

"New topic, Downfall," replied Daphne abruptly. "Someone who has been doing something that the Ministry or Dumbledore didn't have the guts to do in the past."

"The Ministry has to do something, even though I think my aunt is grateful for Downfall showing up at the right time, because Voldemort would have killed her," said Susan.

"There are a lot of people in the Ministry who want Downfall taken down, not just because it's the law, but because they're scared," said Neville.

"I wonder why, it couldn't have to be because of a certain tattoo they have on their forearms, could it?" asked Daphne.

"Of course, what else could it be?" commented Ginny as she shook her head. "The Ministry is looking out for Downfall, officially, but I doubt that it will be something that they will put much effort into. Not that it will really matter anyway."

"Downfall is a step ahead of the Ministry," said Harry shortly.

"Almost as good as you, right, Harry?" asked Luna with a knowing smile. "You just wonder who it is."

"Well it's not the person under the mask who is scaring the Death Eaters, it's the mask itself," said Ginny cryptically.

"Downfall could be anyone and no one would notice the difference," replied Harry calmly, as him and Ginny exchanged looks, it was obvious that the other members of the group were catching onto what they were saying. Hermione sat there, looking out the window in a dazed expression. "You've been keeping up with your potions right, Hermione?"

"Yes, Harry, I have, every day after dinner like you said," answered Hermione with a blank expression on her face, but she did not want to let Harry down. Harry had gone to the trouble of personally preparing the potions that would help with her Dark Arts Dependency and she could not let him down.

"Good, Hermione, I'm glad, keep it up during the year," said Harry.

"I know, if I slip, it could return worse than ever, I don't know if I could handle the voices a second time, they made me do bad things," responded Hermione in a terrified, almost childish, voice, she took the potion every day at the exact same time, an entire dosage was good

for twenty four hours, if her life depended on it. She did not want to become that monster again. The others were talking, as Hermione buried herself in the sixth year Charms textbook, to distract herself from the conversation that was none of her business.

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Even though she had no physical form because Harry could not wear the Resurrection Stone in public, Lily could still observe what was going on, through her son's eyes, just like she could for the last fifteen years. Her belief that something needed to be done was strengthened when she watched Harry's experiences, helpless to do anything to stop. Petunia and her family had already paid for their sins, so Lily spared little thought on them recently. It was still a bit tragic, as Lily had gotten along with Petunia for eleven years, until that was until she got her letter from Hogwarts, then Petunia slowly devolved into a jealous bitch. Still, never in her dreams, Lily never expected Petunia to act that way towards an innocent child, much less her own nephew. Her husband was worse and as for Dudley, well he was a product of the attitudes of both of his parents. It was perhaps for the best that he died with his parents.

Of course, Dumbledore had contributed to some of that hatred, by forcing Harry onto the Dursleys without giving them a choice in the matter. Lily had vague memories of Dumbledore performing all sorts of magical tests on Harry, not that she recognized any of them straight off. However, she knew enough to realize that Dumbledore would have noticed not only that Harry had the Horcrux within him, but also the nature of the charm. Naturally, it could not be broken without using the spell to bring Lily back to life or killing Harry, two things that were out of the question. So Dumbledore used dark magic, the blood protection, to try to corrupt the properties of the charm, to ensure that Lily would never come back. There was something being protected alright and that was Dumbledore's interests in the role that he wished Harry to fulfill. Dumbledore wanted to be the only one who had a say in Harry's life. For similar reasons Sirius was sent to Azkaban. Lily could hardly wait for Harry to finish off Dumbledore for good, for a variety of reasons. For one, it would finally rid the Wizarding World of his corruptive influence and if Harry got his hands on the Elder Wand, that might be powerful enough to cast the

countercharm to bring her back, despite of the corrupted properties. She neglected to tell Harry, because she was afraid he might jump the gun and try to get the wand, throwing his well placed plans out the window.

Lily was relieved when Harry and Ginny began dating. Her deepest, darkest, fear was Harry would end up with that Granger abomination. Lily heard the people that compared Hermione to her and it made her want to kill something. If anything, Hermione reminded her a bit like Petunia, when her jealousy had began to kick in. Hermione would be the worst thing that could have happened to Harry. She wanted to strangle the girl all those times Hermione treated Harry like he was inferior or stupid. Harry was smarter than Hermione ever would be and so was Ginny. The two really complicated each other, and them, along with the rest of their friends, the sky was the limit. The Ministry, Dumbledore, or Voldemort would never see it coming.

It was also remarkable how well Ginny turned out despite her mother's poor ability to be a parent and her mindset of how she thought things should be rooted in another time. Lily hoped that Molly Weasley would join the rest of the world in the twentieth century, but she highly doubted it. After seven kids, five of them already having left the house and limited their contact to their smother er mother, one would think Molly would learn something. That person would be an ignorant fool. She seemed to get even worse when Arthur died. The wrong Weasley died and Lily felt no regrets for thinking that. Molly Weasley's attitude made her want to induce vomit. She wanted to turn her daughter in a housewife, on the arm of a wizard, with no hopes or ambitions of her own. She had been known to complain about her financial system and Arthur's lack of ambition when he was alive, but nothing was stopping her from getting off of her arse and getting a job, especially when all of the children had been sent off to Hogwarts.

Still, Harry and Ginny were meant with each other, Lily was adamant about this. They have faced their own trials and came out stronger. She did wish she would have had some control over her son's thoughts and answer, because he would have been friends with Ginny two years before he was and would have ditched the dead weight as well if she had any say.

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At night, Hermione walked up to her dormitories, after taking her potion. She hurried up, not wanting to face anyone. Everyone was looking at her, the scars on her face, pointing at her, muttering, laughing at the Mudblood screwing up.

"Hermione, Hermione!" shouted Ron urgently and Hermione turned around, before she just looked at Ron with a cold indifferent expression.

"Oh, it's you," said Hermione coolly, she had not bothered to spare Ron a second thought this summer. He was worthless and besides, he did not write to her over the summer, to see how she was holding up. The fact that she once had feelings for a brief time in her third year, towards the beginning of the fourth year, made her want to throw up.

"Hermione, I was looking for you all over the train," said Ron as he looked over his shoulder nervously. "Why didn't you respond to your letters?"

"What letters? I didn't get one piece of mail from you, Ronald," responded Hermione icily. "As for your question, not it's any of your business, but I was sitting with my friends. My real friends, not a traitorous worm like yourself, I can't believe you think I would ever talk to you after what you did to Harry and Ginny."

"What are you talking about?" demanded Ron. "You turned your back on Harry too and you wanted to kill Ginny."

"I did, but there were voices that were telling me what to do," said Hermione, brushing up Ron's concerns. "I was blinded. I made a mistake that I'm paying for. You can't even look me in the face, no one can. Yes, I'm Hermione Granger, the scarred Mudblood fuck up. Pity me, Ronald, in a sadly veiled attempt to get underneath my robes. Try and claim you're there for me, when you're not, because you're jealous of my grades, just like you're jealous of Harry's magical ability

and that Ginny can fly around you at Quidditch. You're jealous of your own sister, you make me sick, Ronald."

"Says the person who puts dark curses on people, just to shut them," said Ron in an accusing tone of voice. "Besides, could you remove it?"

"Remove what?" asked Hermione, who was confused at what this ignoramus was babbling on about.

"The binding curse that you put on me, that would make my heart implode if I told anyone about what you were up to," said Ron.

"Very funny, Weasley, as if I'd even bother with you, when a simple threat would do to keep you in line," said Hermione coldly. "Besides, even I did put this alleged curse on you, its locked away with them."

"What's locked away with who?" asked Ron in confusion and Hermione just sighed. Ronald Weasley was as thick as a brick and about as dumb as mud as far as she was concerned.

"The voices and everything I learned, is gone, locked away, never to be opened again, the treatment that Harry has provided for me has made sure of it," said Hermione.

"Harry Potter, it always has to be with him," said Ron, who was constantly lectured by his mother about why he could not have ambition like Harry. Harry this, Harry that, Harry did this, Harry did that, Ron was sick of that attention hogging egomaniac.

"The thing is it always is him, because he actually does take time to be ambitions enough to accomplish something," said Hermione through narrowed eyes. "What have you done?"

"Obviously nothing to please you, even though I've stood by you when the entire school hated your guts when you tried to drug Harry with that love potion and now you want to ditch me because Harry has decided to forgive you for some stupid reason," said Ron hotly. "I swear to Merlin, I can't do anything to please you. Why is it that I can never seem to do anything right in your eyes?"

"Maybe that's because you can't do anything right!" screamed Hermione as she turned before she made her way off to the girl's dormitory. The potion had begun to kick in and she wanted to be as far away from Ron Weasley as possible. By then, the Common Room was full of people, who all stared at Ron. Some of them looked very amused, at the expression on Ron's face.

"What?" snapped Ron angrily as several girls giggled at his plight.

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"I've got a busier schedule than everyone else, but with only four subjects, since I've already got my NEWT for Defense, it shouldn't be too much of a problem," said Harry.

"I think you can everything in your sleep anyway, Harry," said Ginny, as they walked down to their room.

"D.A. meetings three times a week I think, including an extended one on the weekends, I had to give up Quidditch to accommodate the new schedule, but it should work out," said Harry. "Now I can get a closer look to see who has potential of the younger students."

"It will work out well Harry," responded Ginny as they reached their bed and sat down. "You were in there for a while..."

"I know, McGonagall informed me that my first meeting with Dumbledore is Saturday evening after dinner, which is a shame as I planned to hold a D.A. meeting then," said Harry. "However, we have to keep up appearances and I'll be leaving the meeting in very capable hands, namely yours."

Ginny nodded, there would be times where Harry would be unavailable for the D.A. meetings and it was pretty much agreed between them that the other five leaders would alternate in taking on the responsibilities for making sure the group stays on task.

This year at Hogwarts would prove to be very eventful.

And there's Chapter Thirty Three. It took me a while to actually get rolling on this chapter for some reason, but once I did, it was pretty simple to write.

Very little on the Downfall front this chapter, but I think next chapter will make up for that.

Chapter Thirty Four: Moonlight

Before Harry knew it, it was time to teach his first Defensive Magic class. If he was honest with himself, Harry was just a tiny bit nervous. For the past year, he held the D.A. meetings, but this was an entirely different animal all together. He had to toe to a mostly Ministry approved line, although obviously after the Umbridge fiasco last year, Harry would be allowed to go outside the box slightly. Not too much, but at the very least, he could put even more of an emphasis of the practical aspects of his chosen subject. After all, he still had the D.A. to go out and he would be keeping a close eye on the younger years, for future recruits, over the next couple of months. He needed to prepare the next generation of the Wizarding World for where they needed to go, as there was only a small fraction of the people who were in charge there that Harry knew he could afford to keep.

“First year Slytherins and Ravenclaws, today,” remarked Harry.

“Look on the bright side Harry, it’s their first class too, it’s not like they have a standard for you to live up to,” said Neville.

“Harry, there’s no reason why you might be the best teacher we’ve ever had,” replied Ginny.

“I don’t know, I have a lot to live up to, with such legendary teachers like Gilderoy Lockhart and Dolores Umbridge,” said Harry with a slight smile before he shook his head. “But I’ve got a plan for all seven years ready, based on my experiences with the past five years and what they taught. Fred and George told me about the teacher they had the year before I came, I believe that covers all the bases.”

“Yeah it does, Harry,” responded Ginny, as she kissed Harry, who returned it. It would have lasted longer but Harry needed to get to his class to teach “Good luck, I think you’ll be fine.”

“Thanks Ginny, I appreciate,” said Harry as he assumed a business like expression on his face. Harry walked forward and he could see Ron Weasley approaching him. He quickened his pace, the last thing he wanted was to talk with him. Naturally, Ron and Hermione’s argument had spread throughout the school like wildfire. The thing

that amused Harry the most was that people acted like Ron and Hermione arguing was something new and exciting. Rather it was about as played as Malfoy calling someone a Mudblood or Dumbledore having a twinkle in his eye. The steps quickened and Ron approached Harry.

“Potter!” shouted Ron. “I want a word with you now.”

“Now, Mr. Weasley, I’m afraid that won’t do,” said Harry calmly. “I don’t know if you know, but I’m now a professor so it would be in your best interests to call me Professor Potter or sir. I could put you in detention and take points off of Gryffindor if you don’t watch your step. However, since you’re a remedial learner, I’ll just let you off with a warning.”

“What did you do to Hermione?” asked Ron before he added, almost as if he pained him to say it. “Professor Potter.”

“I helped her, Ronald,” responded Harry calmly. “She might have turned her back on me during the Triwizard, but still, it was the right thing to do. I helped open her mind to new possibilities, to show her that the current route is not the way to go. I helped heal her. I’ve given her a purpose for life.”

“What purpose is that, sir?” asked Ron hotly.

“That’s not for me to share, but judging by the look on your face, that purpose doesn’t involve you,” said Harry.

“I just can’t believe you forgave her like that, after she tried to kill Ginny,” said Ron, unable to keep his tongue any longer.

“Wait a minute, are you defending her or condemning her?” asked Harry who looked at Ron, who was trying to both defend Hermione and call Harry insane for trusting her. “She tried to kill Ginny because she was ill, she had a disease, and she was deluded into doing something that she would not have normally done if she had a clear head. The dark arts took her over mind and made her do it. That problem’s been corrected. It’s not my fault Hermione doesn’t want to be friends with you. You can’t go blaming people for everything that

goes wrong in your life, Ronald. You might irritate the wrong person and then you'll meet your downfall."

"It's just like you Potter, you get everything, everything goes right just because you have a scar on your forehead and you got lucky, when you beat You-Know-Who," spat Ron angrily. "Without Dumbledore, you're nothing."

"That's nice that you feel that way Ronald, but rest assure one thing, step one toe out of line, and I will be forced to punish you," said Harry. "I have certain responsibilities right now and I need to help maintain a positive learning environment at Hogwarts. The fact remains that you can't instigate arguments anymore. It's just bad for Hogwarts. Remember, we can get along peacefully, you follow the rules and keep your temper in check. Or we won't get along and I can make Snape look like a girl scout. You are to leave Hermione alone too; it's obvious that you're a negative influence on her recovery. Is that understood? A simple yes, sir or no, sir will do fine."

"Yes, sir," said Ron in a bland voice, as he knew it would be a lost cause to argue. Potter held all the cards and all the power. A group of students looked around, along with a few teachers. McGonagall nodded her head approvingly at Harry handling the incident with a clear head before she turned to Ron.

"I do agree as well, Mr. Weasley and rest assure I will see to it that I write to your mother if you act with anything less than the dignity and maturity I expect of a member of the Gryffindor house," added McGonagall sternly and Ron winced, along with several other people nearby. The Molly Weasley Howlers were legendary and something that many had suffered through countless times.

"I'll get to my first class then," said Harry as he turned to walk off. Several students, mostly in the D.A., glared at Ron. Right now, Hermione walked past the scene, with as if Ron was part of the wall. She had first period Arithmancy she needed to get to and she was over Ron anyway. Along with the potions, Hermione took steps to rid her life of all negative influences that would cause her to fall back to the dark arts. Ron Weasley was one of those influences and something that was not worth Hermione's time. She wanted to do bad

things to him every time he opened his mouth and that was the last thing she needed.

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“Alright, welcome to your first Defensive Magic class, my name is Professor Harry Potter, I’m sure a few of you may have heard of me,” said Harry after he had taken attendance for his first class and several of the first years snickered. “Now this class was once called Defense Against the Dark Arts, but for internal reasons, it has been renamed to Defensive Magic. Many of the same subjects will be taught, a heavy emphasis on defending against dark spells and dark creatures. However other branches of magic will be touched on and how they are employed in battle, along with how to defend against them.”

The entire class was all ears and Harry took advantage of their attention.

“Now first of all, I’ll be completely honest with all of you,” said Harry seriously as he surveyed each of the members of his class, many of them full with innocence, unaware of the harsh realities of the world. He could not remember a time where he was like that “The world is not a nice, kind place. There are all sorts of dangers out there that ordinary people have to deal with every day. Now I’m sure many of you will be lucky enough and not be put in danger. Actually, I hope you don’t, I hope you aren’t put in the position where you have to use anything that I have to teach you. That your friends and your family, along with yourselves are safe, not having to deal with the threats that are out in the world. I hope that and I know you all hope that, but at the same time, I know the chances of every one of you living a quiet life are next to nothing. I would be lying to you and doing a disservice if I told you differently. I’m sure many of your parents would like to shield you from it, but it’s out there. If you’ve lived in the Wizarding World, you’ve heard the name Lord Voldemort and many of the things he’s done. If you’re a Muggleborn, you’ll find out too much about him soon enough.”

“But, sir, he’s not even a pureblood, how can he be a threat?” asked one of the Slytherin first years. Internally Harry smiled, it was obvious his attempts to wreck Voldemort’s reputation had worked.

“Yes, Voldemort does portray himself as something he is not but it just shows how dangerous he really is,” said Harry. “It makes you wonder what extent he’ll go to gain power if he’s willing to lie about his past, to delude people into following him. I will make one point perfectly clear. Voldemort may look like some great savior of blood purity to some people. However, the only interests Voldemort serves is of his own. Those who follow him may have convinced themselves that Voldemort would allow them to share the power. They are the people that Voldemort plays like a puppet on a string. It’s a carefully done mastered game, one that he’s been playing for years and will continue to play until he’s defeated for good.”

Harry decided to cut off any further talk about Voldemort.

“As this former class name suggests and as the case may continue to be, there will still be a heavy emphasis on what the dark arts are and how to defend against them,” said Harry. “Obviously broad terms such as the dark arts leave much up to interpretation and many people have their own opinion on what really is considered dark. However, officially, we must stick through the Ministry approved definition of dark magic.”

Harry paused, before he cleared his throat and held up a piece of paper, before he looked at the class. While some of them were too young to really have that much of an informed opinion on the Ministry, some of them had parents that worked at that and it was obvious from the looks on their faces that they heard some rather negative things.

“The Ministry of Magic shall deem any potentially dangerous magic as dark and it will be punishable by law, through imprisonment in Azkaban prison. Dark magic may include but is not limited to, spells that can be used to intend harm, spells that have not been approved by the Ministry Board of Spell Regulation, and unregulated modifications of existing spells. A list of restricted spells is available through the office of the Minister of Magic upon request,” read Harry

as paused, seeing the confused looks on the faces of many of his first year students. “Basically, to put it in simpler terms, anything that is not been approved by the Ministry are considered dark. Anything that you learn at Hogwarts and anything available in the main Hogwarts library is safe. Anything that can be found in the Restricted Section, there may be some spells mentioned that are regulated by the Ministry but since very few of you will even come near that section until your Ordinary Wizarding Levels are completed, it is not something that you will worry about. Now this year, I hope to cover the following material within the next ten months.”

Harry then began to go into the curriculum for the next year, as some of the more ambition members of his class took notes, while asking questions. Overall, they were a rather respectful group of first years. Perhaps it was out of fear or maybe out of respect, whatever one it was, it just made Harry’s job a lot easier.

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A duo of Death Eaters stumbled forward in the dark towards a Muggle Orphanage. The sounds of filthy children playing inside cut through their ears, it made them sick. It was just wrong that precious space was set aside for these orphans. That could have been better set aside for the good of magic. The Dark Lord had convinced them to spread fear and what better way to spread fear was to being able to torch an entire orphanage full of children. It would be glorious.

“Wilson, lock the doors and windows, I’ll conjure lighter fluid around the building, we’ll torch this building up,” said the Death Eater.

“Right Travers,” said the Death Eater known as Wilson but as he walked forward, he saw a very familiar figure in the shadows. He gasped. “You, get away from me!”

“You maim, yet you run from justice,” said Downfall coldly as the masked figure approached Wilson on foot. A black light fired from the wand but it bounced off of the robes. Two more attacks, each of them repelled and Downfall disarmed the Death Eater, while breaking his hand in the process. Downfall hoisted up Wilson and he dropped to the ground with a loud crash. The Death Eater landed on the base of

his neck, snapping. Yellow acid released from a miniature spray can splashed against the body of Wilson, dissolving the Death Eater's skin and bones immediately. Wilson was reduced to next to nothing.

"Alright Wilson it's all set..." said Travers, before he faced off against Downfall. The figure stood in the shadows, before a gloved hand was lifted. Travers thought to disappear but remembered what he heard happened to the last person who tried it. Out of desperation, Travers raised his wand. "AVADA KEDAVRA!"

A solid metal shield appeared, almost instantly, as if there was no thought at all. The spell struck the shield and Downfall stood there, before the shield morphed into a spike. The spike propelled towards Travers at the speed of light. The Death Eater could not stop it in time as the spike impaled right through his arm, right through the flesh, breaking bone. Downfall stepped forward, as Travers slumped against the ground and tried to reach his wand with his good arm. A foot stomped on his fingers, breaking them immediately.

"They fall one by one, brick by brick, until there is only one, then Lord Voldemort shall fall as well," said Downfall in a chilling voice as Travers just mustered a hateful look towards his tormenter. "The end is here, for you."

A bright orange light shot right into the eyes of Travers. Travers screamed.

"The children have been shielded from your screams, just like they have been protected from your crimes," said Downfall cruelly as a super amplified pain attacked each and every one of the nerve endings of the Death Eater. Travers was paralyzed when his body was overloaded with pain, he went into shock, and then his body slowly shut down, painfully. Downfall watched, the last thing Travers managed to see was the chilling nightmare of the face. The last thought that went through his mind was that Downfall was not human.

Downfall bent down, to transport the remains of Travers to a place where the Ministry could find him, as a reminder of their failure to protect the Wizarding World. The cancer was slowly being removed. Everything was going as planned.

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The weekend D.A. meeting had concluded, with Harry making it back just in time for the most meeting wrap up. Judging by what Daphne, Susan, Luna, and Neville said, Ginny did a fine job in leading the meeting. Some of the members were a bit out of practice after an entire summer of no meetings, but nothing too glaring. It could be fixed within a matter of a couple of meetings. After, Harry and Ginny updated the other members of their inner circle on several important things they needed to know. It was information that needed to be told in a secure area, where they could not be overheard.

Once Daphne, Susan, Luna, and Neville had all went there separate ways, this left Harry and Ginny alone in the Room of Requirement. Harry removed the Resurrection Stone from his bag and activated it. Seconds later, the form of Lily Potter appeared, who had a very irritated look on her face.

"I don't know what Dumbledore's playing at right now, he could have given you all of that information within a couple of hours verbally without spreading it out over a year and showing you these memories," said Lily. "He should just tell you about the Horcruxes and get it over with."

"Well considering I already knew about them, it isn't too much of a concern," said Harry.

"Besides, Dumbledore isn't going to teach Harry anything of value, wouldn't really want the student to surpass the teacher?" asked Ginny.

"Too late for that I think, because the thing is right now, I think it might be a tough battle, but I responded I can beat Dumbledore in a duel," responded Harry in a confident voice. "He's good, powerful, but he has a very distinct weakness. He fights to maintain the status quo. I fight to win. There is a difference. It's just that right now fighting Dumbledore straight up would be a huge mistake."

"Actually, that's smart, because even though you would beat Dumbledore, he is still powerful," said Lily. "The chances of you

getting a serious injury that Voldemort or anyone else could take advantage of you.”

“Besides the plan you have is good enough,” said Ginny. “Dumbledore will fall soon enough, don’t worry.”

“I’m not, because I know I’ve visualized Dumbledore’s end in my head and me getting the Elder Wand,” said Harry. “It will happen, when it’s ready to happen.”

“The Defense classes are going well, the D.A. is taking off to new heights, you have your influence inside the Ministry more and more, Voldemort is looking over his shoulder for obvious reasons, and soon Dumbledore will be finished,” said Ginny with a smile.

“It’s not over until both Dumbledore or Voldemort are dead and that’s when the real work begins,” concluded Harry.

“You know what was amusing?” asked Lily suddenly. “Severus’s face every time he sees you. It’s like the fact you got his favorite position and he didn’t, it is actually causing him physical pain.”

“Yeah that is pretty amusing, but he deserves it, I don’t even know why Dumbledore even bothered to hire him as a teacher, well actually I know, but I can’t believe more people didn’t complain,” responded Harry. “Although Mum, seriously, I’ve been meaning to ask you...”

“What was the deal between me and Snape?” asked Lily with a knowing smile as Harry and Ginny looked at her. “Remember, I said I experienced everything, including all of your thoughts and I mean all of them.”

“Right, so what’s up anyway?” asked Ginny.

“Well, the short story is we were friends, not as close as Severus would have liked to think, but for the first five years of Hogwarts,” said Lily before she took a deep breath. “I suppose the short story won’t be good enough but as with all young witches and wizards, I experienced accidental bursts of magic. I was able to do things that no one else I knew my age could do. Naturally, I was raised in a

family of Muggles and had no explanations at hand. Fortunately or unfortunately, depending on how you look at things, I met someone who explained to me perfectly what I was. This person had been following me and Petunia around, watching us for some time. Now that I think about it, in retrospect, it is rather creepy what happened. Still, I remember that day, when I first met one Severus Snape."

"So he was following you around, what did he say?" asked Harry as Ginny leaned against him, grabbing his arm. Snape always was sticking his nose where it did not really belong, even at ten years old.

"I didn't believe it when he said I was a witch, but after he offered me proof, books, I was convinced and intrigued," said Lily with a smile. "I wanted to learn anything I could and despite the fact that I was a bit uncomfortable at first around Snape, but my curiosity got the best of me. I learned everything I could, in fact I learned too much. That and I felt sorry for him. There were things I found out that an eleven year old girl really should not be exposed to. My initial distrust of the Wizarding World was built from there that only grew as I got older. I had no choice but to go to Hogwarts but when I was there, I would make the most of it."

Lily looked thoughtful.

"I was sorted into Gryffindor, the hat wanted to put me into Slytherin," said Lily and Harry and Ginny both nodded, they had similar experiences. "That's where I first met James and his friends. I had never met anyone who I had loathed more in my life up until that time. They eventually grew out of it for the most part, but for the first few years, they were obnoxious. James and Sirius more so, but Severus was their main target. He would have liked you to believe he was the innocent victim, but the truth was, he instigated as much as the Marauders did. It was both ways, not one hundred percent either way."

"I figured as much, just like I'm sure Snape made Dumbledore believe that someone twisted his arm to join the Death Eaters," replied Harry.

"No, he did that willingly, mostly by falling in with a bad crowd of Slytherins, who made it their personal mission in life to torment every

muggleborn witch and wizard in the school,” said Lily. “They never went after me for some reason. Perhaps Severus convinced them to back off but I doubt it. More likely it was the fact that I knocked Bellatrix around when she tried to start something with me. She was considered to be one of the best duelists in the school. Still when I was about fourteen, I began to learn the dark arts, mostly as a way to defend myself, as Voldemort’s campaign was really picking up steam then, Muggleborn attacks were on the rise, and people were getting bolder. I wasn’t going to be a target if I could help it.”

“I understand,” said Harry.

“You did what you had to do,” added Ginny.

“I never told James exactly how much I knew, because he refused to see the world in anything beyond the Dumbledore approved definitions of black and white,” responded Lily. “Thankfully, it never came to the point where he had to choose between me and Dumbledore. Actually, I don’t really want to do.”

“So when did you and Snape drift apart?” asked Harry.

“Severus taught me everything he could, thinking that if he did me a favor, our relationship might be something more other than friends,” said Lily as she shook her head. “By the time we had our big fight that ended everything. I had become tired of his excuses, trying to justify the behavior of his friends. The fact that he became obsessed with where Remus was going every month beyond the point of reason, just wanting to get his enemies in trouble because of some school grudge. Especially considering the true reason, I knew since halfway into my first year. Anyone with access to a calendar and a decent amount of common sense could figure it out. That and Remus is a really, really, bad liar.”

Ginny, Harry, and Lily all laughed at that. It was true, Sirius and Remus had told stories about some of the excuses that Remus used to cover up his monthly disappearances. They were really bad some of them and not credible. Even Remus looked back on them.

“Severus suffered a very near miss at the hands of a transformed Remus, when Sirius, who was not really in the best of moods that day if I remember rightly, had basically sent Snape into the waiting jaws of Remus. Had James not intervened, it would have been bad, for Remus especially, because, there’s no delicate way to say this, he would have been put down by the Ministry,” said Lily somberly. “You would have thought this would have taught Severus a lesson but that would be wrong. I distanced myself from him as much as possible, his friends were getting more out of hand than ever before and Snape was becoming no better. Then, he slipped up and called me a Mudblood, which gave me the perfect excuse to end our friendship. At times, I wondered if I sent him straight to Voldemort, but looking back, he was heading down that road that way no matter what I would have done. The only difference is that he’s gone from Voldemort to Dumbledore and most days, I don’t know what’s worse.”

“Thanks, Mum, you really put my mind to ease,” said Harry.

“Don’t mention it, Harry, Bellatrix has a rather distorted view of the truth, her mind fabricated the basic reality for something more sensationalized,” answered Lily, as both of them nodded. “She’s used to playing with the heads of her victims, I’m proud to say that neither of you fell for it.”

“Right, it’s getting late,” commented Harry and Lily nodded.

“Sooner or later, we’ll find a way to return me to the real world, but until then, we’ll have to rely on the Stone as a means to bring me out,” said Lily as if this was just not a matter of if, but rather when that would happen. “Goodnight, Harry, goodnight Ginny.”

“Night, Mum,” said Harry.

“Night, Lily,” replied Ginny, as Harry removed the ring, thus causing Lily’s form to slowly fade out.

“I knew there was a perfectly logical explanation,” said Harry.

“Snape’s still going to die though, right?” asked Ginny.

“Of course, all in due time, just like the rest of them, one by one,” said Harry, as Ginny snuggled up against Harry in the arm chair that manifested in the Room of Requirement. There was no need to move, it was comfort where they were.

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“I do wish you would contact me when these things happen, Aberforth,” said Albus Dumbledore as he sat in the backroom of his brother Aberforth’s pub, the Hog’s Head. “Three incidents involving this Downfall in Hogsmeade, including one at the Hog’s Head itself. It’s getting to be dangerous and people could get hurt.”

“Only people with a tattoo of a skull with a snake coming out of its mouth, Albus,” corrected Aberforth as he looked at his brother. “I don’t see what the big deal is anyway. So a few Death Eaters are getting killed. What’s the big deal?”

“The big deal is that this type of vigilante action should be discouraged,” said Albus calmly. “People going beyond what the Ministry is trying to enforce is going to cause even more trouble than even Voldemort could manage.”

“You know Albus, I do wish you could listen yourself sometimes, so you can hear exactly how hypocritical you sound,” said Aberforth. “These Death Eaters murder, rape, torture, and who knows what else and you think that this Downfall character is in the wrong. Personally, the Death Eaters are getting what they deserved.”

“I believe everyone deserves a second chance after they have paid their debt to society,” said Albus. “If they are killed, then what chance would they have for redemption?”

“Yes, these second chances, involving folks that have already broken out of Azkaban once or even twice,” said Aberforth, rolling his eyes slightly. “Look Albus, I don’t know who appointed you as the watchdog of the Wizarding World, but you have no power, you are one meddling infraction of being thrown into Azkaban to be surrounded by the trash you help enable, and I have no hesitation in saying that if you stand in the way of Downfall, whomever is under

the mask will make sure you take an unplanned trip to the next great adventure as you call it. Not to mention the games that you're playing with Potter. You did do a number on him, if he doesn't suspect you're using him to continue your legacy from beyond the grave."

"Aberforth, the Wizarding World needs a strong leader to help rally them behind the forces of darkness," responded Albus.

"Like you're the best judge for what anyone needs, you could have been like Riddle, had it not been for..." said Aberforth.

"It's been years ago, Aberforth, that is in the past, we must look towards the future," said Albus.

"How can there be a future if we keep making the same mistakes of the past and you don't do anything about it?" asked Aberforth as he sighed. "If Downfall shows up, I'll let you know, if I manage to remember."

"Thank you Aberforth," said Albus gratefully but Aberforth just looked at his brother without a smile or a nod. "I'll just show myself the door."

"You do that Albus," said Aberforth coolly.

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Luna walked towards the Ravenclaw Common Room, as she stuffed the latest addition of the Quibbler into her bag. Her father wrote about how Downfall was really Gilderoy Lockhart, returning to get revenge on the Wizarding World. It was a rather amusing article. The thing was that her father never wrote a lie. His articles were hard facts, along with what circumstantial evidence that can be used in anyway to loosely tie those facts together. She was amused at everyone stumbling around, trying to figure out the identity of Downfall. They refused to look at the one obvious clue that was staring at them.

Still, even though she knew the truth, Luna knew she would find herself enjoying all the theories. Both the serious and the not quite as serious theories, no matter who they came from.

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The night of the full moon, as the sun was just about down, a pair of Death Eaters snuck around Hogsmeade, dressed in robes. The Dark Lord had promised them gold and power if they would take a look around the village for any activity that would be of interest for their master. Naturally they jumped on the chance. They were fairly new recruits in the last few months, out for gold and power, young, impulsive, ready to take any shortcuts to the top of the Death Eaters.

"Nothing so far, this village is boring at night," said one of the Death Eaters.

"Let's look over at the Hog's Head, perhaps there's some action over there," suggested another Death Eater as he stepped forward but that was the last step he took as an Incendio Bomb dropped down where he stood. Blasts of fire were released and the Death Eater burst into flames. His partner stopped in surprise.

"That trick never gets old," said a ghostly, almost distorted voice and The Death Eater stepped forward to see Downfall.

"CRUCIO!" shouted the Death Eater at the top of his lungs, but the spell was dodged. He would not be denied. Another pair of attacks, but each of them were avoided. He wanted those five thousand Galleons the Dark Lord promised to anyone who could unmask this blood traitor so badly he could taste it. "Come on, fight straight up."

"A young man throwing his future away, what a waste," commented Downfall in a chilling voice as the Death Eater continued the attacks; they got more and more urgent, beyond his power and abilities, as he nearly collapsed. "I believe it's time to wrap things up."

Several bandages shot from the wand of Downfall. The Death Eater cackled as the bandages wrapped around his arms and legs. He raised his wand and threw a cutting spell, but that just caused the bandages to snake up towards his neck. The bandages wrapped around the throat of the Death Eater, getting tighter and tighter. It was difficult to tell what happened first. Whether it was his neck snapping

or his throat being crushed, it really did not matter. The only thing that mattered was that he met his end.

A slow and loud clapping caused Downfall to turn around and Fenrir Greyback approached him, a twisted smile in his yellow teeth.

"I must say, Downfall, to see you kill those two young men, well it warms my heart to see such carnage," responded Greyback as the sun had gone completely down by now.

"Fenrir Greyback, mass murdering werewolf, responsible for countless deaths and blood shed," said Downfall.

"Please, you're making me blush," responded Greyback with a twisted grin. "Seriously, your time has ran out, the Dark Lord wants you dead and tonight's the full moon. My night, you see, the night where I get to torment as many unfortunate souls I want. I'm going to rip your flesh apart with my teeth and taste your blood. You might say that we're going to have a howling good time."

Greyback cackled at his own pun but Downfall remained humorless as ever.

"Well you'll no fun," said Greyback as the moon came up, as he felt the transformation coming on. "It's time for dinner and I guess you could say that you're the guest of honor."

Greyback's robes ripped, as dirty grey fur grew on his body. He turned his yellow eyes, his sharp teeth and his paws with razor sharp claws. He gave a mighty howl before he stalked his prey. Downfall stood there, before a coil sprung at Greyback. The beast was very nearly wrapped up with razor wire but he broke free with his enhanced strength.

The wolf dove at Downfall, who avoided the attack before Greyback was blasted backwards. This attack only proved to incense the werewolf as Downfall tossed an Incendio Bomb right at Greyback. Greyback batted the device off to the side with his paw and it slammed right into an abandoned cottage, bursting it into flames. The

werewolf stopped as a dart impacted the side of his neck. While it would be enough to kill a human, it only served to slow him down.

“Come on you filthy mongrel, is that the best that Lord Voldemort has to offer?” said Downfall and Greyback sprung at his prey, jaws snapping. Downfall disappeared out of the way and Greyback slammed right through the wooden door of the Honeydukes. The werewolf looked around and Downfall stood right in the back of the shop, before the vigilante flung a tray of acid pops right at Greyback. Greyback dodged the attack and smashed up the shelves, as a charm as kept to keep the Honeydukes owners upstairs and out of danger. “One step closer, and I will neuter you.”

Greyback dove, a crazed expression in the transformed werewolf's eyes. Downfall dodged out of the way of one charge but a second charge, Downfall was not so lucky.

Greyback slammed his paws into Downfall and the vigilante crashed right through a window. Glass flew everywhere as Greyback backed off. He was enticed by the smell of blood but a spell struck his side, knocking the wolf off balance and causing him to spin around.

The werewolf howled, before it looked up in confusion. Hovering above him in the air, on a broomstick, was Downfall. The werewolf sniffed, while its prey looked the same, the scent was different. The momentary confusion was taken complete advantage of, when a silver muzzle was snapped around the jaw and snout of Greyback. The wolf struggled to remove it.

“Now you won't be able to bite and spread your filthy disease, mongrel. Much like all rabid animals, there comes a time where you must be put to sleep,” responded Downfall coldly and Greyback went into a frenzy, smashing up the shop, but no matter what, he could not get the muzzle off. A conjured silver knife appeared in mid air, hovering right above Greyback. “This could kill you, but what I'm about to do, will kill you.”

A solid steel spike appeared in mid air and slammed down right into the top of the werewolf's head. The spike broke busted the skull and impaled right into the brain. Blood splattered to the ground, as

Greyback dropped to the ground. More blood splashed on the ground, as Downfall dropped down to clear up the mess and began to make arrangements to send the remains to Lord Voldemort.

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Voldemort was deep in thought about his eventual plans to overthrow the Ministry but Wormtail entered his room, carrying a large parcel that he struggled to hold up.

“What is the meaning of this interruption, Wormtail?” asked Voldemort

“Begging your forgiveness, my Lord, but this has been sent to you,” said Wormtail and Voldemort made a movement to take the package, before he performed a number of spells on it to check for curses and other traps. When he found none, he opened the package.

Inside the package was the remains of werewolf form of Fenrir Greyback, preserved and stuffed, with a note laid neatly on top of it. Voldemort took the note and unfolded it to read the contents.

Your Death Eaters I will get them all.

Each and every one of them will meet their downfall.

One by one they all drop dead

But the trophy I’m after Riddle, is your head.

Voldemort angrily set fire to the piece of parchment, before he kicked the box containing the stuffed remains of Greyback of sight.

“Get out of my sight, Wormtail,” said Voldemort and Wormtail wasted no time in doing as he was told.

And there’s Chapter Four. Coming up next, more Death Eaters suffer horrific misfortunes and all sorts of fun.

Chapter Thirty Five: Roadblock

"You're saying that Fenrir Greyback was sent to the Dark Lord, stuffed?" asked Dumbledore, eyes widened in shock, at what Severus had reported to him. Snape just sat there, it appeared that he found a small bit of amusement at the final fate of the notorious werewolf. Also there was worry evident on the face of the double agent for obvious reasons.

"That's what I said Dumbledore, I feel I could not make my point any clearer or more plain," said Snape calmly. "Stuffed, like something MacNair would have put on his wall. You know, a trophy. In his werewolf form come to think of it, which was rather surprising. The Dark Lord was angry, but I managed to convince Pettigrew to tell me the full story."

"This is rather troubling Severus," said Dumbledore as he looked over his spectacles, looking every bit of his age. "We're dealing with a very powerful foe to defeat a fully transformed werewolf, especially one that has embraced his disease with reckless abandon like Greyback is. I'm afraid we're dealing with a wizard with decades of magical experience and dark art abilities that may even match that of Tom's."

"That is even if it is a wizard," responded Snape and Dumbledore looked at him. "I think it may very well be a witch underneath those robes and that hood. No one has gotten a good look at Downfall for more than seconds. That is, no one who has lived."

"It doesn't matter who it is, it's just that they're a danger to the Wizarding World," said Dumbledore as he looked at Severus. "Someone needs to deal with the problem before it's too late."

"No, Dumbledore, absolutely not, I'm not going to stick my neck out this time, you've asked me to do a lot, but this goes beyond even what I'm willing to do," said Snape firmly. "Downfall has made sport out of Death Eaters, and not just new recruits, whoever is under the mask is dangerous enough to hold their own against some of the Dark Lord's most dangerous followers."

"You raise a good point Severus, besides you have an important role to serve yet, I could not risk the chance that you could be slaughtered by Downfall, no matter how highly I think of your abilities," said Dumbledore.

"Perhaps you should ask Moody?" suggested Snape.

"No, he has other important duties right now," said Albus. "He's running the Order of the Phoenix after all."

"I thought the Ministry had strictly told you not to restart the Order," said Snape.

"No, the Ministry told me not to start up the group and so I didn't, but Alastor has and I'm just a member, my role is to pass the information you give me onto the Order," said Dumbledore and Snape just looked at Dumbledore. He knew the truth, while Moody was still the leader, he answered Dumbledore. The old man did know how to exploit a loop hole for his benefit. "The members of the Order, while good for eyes and ears, are ill equipped to fight someone like Downfall. Once Harry moves into his role, I'm confident that the Order will be able to return to its previous heights."

"So then who, Potter?" asked Snape a bit sarcastically and Dumbledore just gave him a look that plainly told Snape that he had gone too far.

"No, Severus, Harry cannot be preoccupied with Downfall, he must be focused completely on his destiny in defeating Voldemort and assuming his proper role," responded Dumbledore. "I believe this is a battle that I should have deal with personally. My brother is keeping an eye out for any appearances from Downfall around the area of the Hog's Head. If Aberforth sees him, he will contact me immediately and I can make him see the error of his ways."

Snape did not respond. The truth was that Dumbledore had not fought a straight up battle in many years, with the brief exception of his altercation with the Dark Lord in the Department of Mysteries. Other than that, he had taken a backseat role.

"I can understand what you're thinking Severus, but I believe I have one or two more good duels left in me before I settle down for the next great adventure," replied Dumbledore as he looked at Severus. "Downfall needs to be brought down before the targets become beyond Death Eaters. I feel that no one in the Ministry will come close in dealing with this situation before its too late."

"If you should defeat this Downfall and remove this person's mask, then what?" asked Snape calmly and Dumbledore just looked thoughtful, pondering the answer of this question for about a minute before he responded.

"He or she will be handed over to the Ministry of Magic," responded Dumbledore calmly, who thought it would go a long way of healing his damaged reputation with the Ministry, if he had managed to unmasked Downfall, someone who has proven illusive. "It won't be easy, but I feel that a message should be sent, that the right thing must be done, justice must be served and redemption must be allowed."

Severus just nodded, thinking that it would be nice to live on whatever planet that Albus Dumbledore called home.

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"You look troubled Auror Scrimgeour," said Harry as he ran into the head Auror after an Wizengamot meeting.

"Ah, hello, Harry, yes, I know I seem a bit tired and worn down," said Scrimgeour as he sighed. "Between Lord Voldemort and his Death Eaters, along with this Downfall fiasco, my Aurors are being spread too thin. I'm sure you heard about the team of Aurors that went on that raid in Knockturn Alley."

"Yes, I heard about that, but let's hear it from you," responded Harry.

"Well they never returned alive, the Lestrage Brothers were the one's responsible for it, at least that's what the evidence points at," said Scrimgeour. "It's Death Eaters like them that makes me almost

thankful this Downfall person exists but unfortunately, I can't let my personal feelings get in the way of doing the job I'm supposed to."

"The two new acts that the Wizengamot passed should offer you more relief and funding for the Auror Department," said Harry and Scrimgeour just gave a noncommittal shrug.

"It might, in fact, it will, but not for another couple of years at the most, they do have to be trained up and by then, who knows what state we'll be in," replied Scrimgeour as he looked at Harry seriously. "This should have been done about five or six years about when the Department really went down. Fudge had to cut the funding. Rather short sighted of him in my opinion, because just because there isn't a war now, doesn't mean that there won't be any war later."

"Truer words have never been spoken," said Harry, who had managed to gather enough supporters to push through these acts, just barely. He was working on another idea, but it was a bit controversial and there was a question of what rights would be infringed. Harry wanted mandatory checks for dark marks before anyone entered public magical establishments but something told him this was going to be one he will fight for.

"At least we managed to capture some Death Eaters, it looks like they're barely out of Hogwarts," said Scrimgeour as he shook his head sadly. "I have some paperwork to file on who we captured."

"I'll let you get on your way now," said Harry as he saw Minister Bones walk out of the courtroom, with a tired look on her face. "It looks like Scrimgeour is not the only one who's overworked."

"The entire Ministry's overworked, the fact that we still don't know we can trust...well I'm sure you can imagine," said Bones. "The problem is that there are many people here who weren't with the Ministry during the first war and they don't know how bad it was. They're finding out really quick how badly everything went. If it wasn't for..."

"The Wizarding World basically stumbling enough a one in a million fluke that caused Voldemort to be knocked out of power for almost fifteen years," replied Harry calmly.

“Well, not exactly the way I was going to put it, but more or less unfortunately true,” said Bones with a frown but Harry just stood there.

“Well that’s what it was what happened, no need to be evasive, it’s something that was both the best and worst thing that ever happened to the Wizarding World, when that curse rebounded on Voldemort,” said Harry. “I think people fell back into a false sense of security and stopped worrying about looking over their shoulders. It’s happened before, trust me, I’ve studied history.”

“Yes, I’m afraid you’re right, Harry, I’m not going to sugarcoat this based on our current structure, if Voldemort threw everything at us, we wouldn’t have a prayer in beating him, all of his Death Eaters thrown at us would slaughter the Order,” said Bones. “It doesn’t mean we won’t go down without a fight if it comes to that, maybe in the next five years, but not now. Especially if that many more Aurors get picked off. Too many of them are inexperienced, very few are left from the first time around, it’s not like it’s a long term career prospect anyway.”

“True, but I’m sure you’ll do your very best to work with what you have and you might surprise yourselves, along with Voldemort,” said Harry, who knew that Bones was one hundred percent correct in saying that a Voldemort who was completely focused on the Ministry would destroy that. It was fortunate that Voldemort appeared to be occupied with Downfall at the moment. He was obsessed with unmasking the person under the mask. Perhaps this would buy the Ministry a bit of time, not too much and the fact that the Death Eaters were kept off balance looking over their shoulder. “And who knows. Maybe I have another completely implausible fluke in me the next time I face Voldemort.”

“Perhaps, but in case you don’t, I think plans should be made to deal with Voldemort as soon as possible,” said Bones as she surveyed Harry. There were those rumors about him being the Chosen One. While it was hard to say whether or not it was true, evidence pointed that way. She considered suggesting that Harry have permanent Auror guard, but realized that it would not really matter all that much. If half of the rumors were true, Harry could outclass most of the

Aurors, which was a really sad statement on the Auror Department. "At least I've had more room to breath, as the attempts on my life have died down once Downfall and Voldemort had their tangle."

"Don't breathe easily yet, Minister," said Harry cautiously. "If I had to guess, Voldemort might be stepping back to lure you into a false sense of security and then he'll have you right where he wanted you."

"I'll keep that in mind, just had a lot of my mind over the last couple of months," said Bones who was glad that Susan would become of age in a few weeks, so she could officially take the Bones seat on the Wizengamot. "I trust you have enough on your plate as well with your job at teaching."

"Indeed, I have some assignments from the last that I need to grade and some other things to get ready, so I'll see you soon enough," said Harry and Bones nodded, as Harry made his way to dissapparate back to Hogsmeade before taking the passageway back to Hogwarts. Within the next twenty minutes, he had a D.A. meeting scheduled and while he had plans in place just in case he was unavailable, Harry wanted to take a personal hand in the meetings as much as he could. Everyone should move as fluid as possible so he could position the group for the when the new recruits from the lower years come in. Mostly this year's fourth years, but a couple of third years showed promise that Harry thought he could work with.

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"The first several meetings have been just getting our group back into the swing of things after a summer off," remarked Harry at the latest D.A. meeting. Several new faces appeared in the crowd, from the fourth year, at least twelve new recruits in all, along with a trio of third years that had excelled in Harry's Defensive Magic classes. "To all of our new members I welcome you to the Defense Association. This is a group that is dedicated to actually learning magic that may actually be of use of you in a life or death situation. Some of the spells we learned are considered dark by official Ministry regulations, but I assure you that they aren't dangerous as real dark magic. More like a grey area, but these spells can pack a punch, sometimes even lethal, if used from the right angle. Of course, any spell can be used as a

weapon, if you are inventive enough, as the older D.A. members would tell you.”

Harry paused as the new recruits looked rather impressed at what he was saying and interesting in what the group had to offer.

“If you agree to join on, I have a paper which you need to sign, secrecy and all that, I trust you, but I also know that the most level headed people can snap under pressure given the opportunity, so once you sign the paper, I’ll give you a more complete explanation of the aims and the goals of the group.”

With then Harry stepped back to allow that to sink in. Already he was getting the new recruits talking.

“I believe the best thing would be to have a small demonstration to show off some of the spells that I have taught the D.A. over the past year,” remarked Harry, as he looked towards the other five leaders. “And no offense to any of you, but I think it wouldn’t be the best idea to have me duel any of you. I just know how you fight and what spells you use all too well.”

“No offense taken Harry,” responded Ginny who had an idea of what Harry was going to do.

“Yes, it does get a little tiring knocking us around, doesn’t it?” asked Daphne, but she was smiling, but Harry turned to where the members of the D.A. were sitting.

“Astoria, could you please come up and assist me in this demonstration?” asked Harry.

“Me?” asked Astoria in surprise if she could hardly believe her ears but Harry just smiled.

“Yes, I think you’re good enough to give me a bit of a challenge to make this demonstration less one sided,” said Harry as he beckoned for Astoria to come up. Other than the leaders of the group, Astoria showed the most magical potential. Harry felt she could be nearly as powerful as him and Ginny given the proper training and

encouragement. If he could only work on her taste in wizards, but that was another matter entirely.

“Okay Harry, if you’re sure,” said Astoria as she got up to her seat to face off against Harry.

“I’m sure,” responded Harry as he turned slightly to address the D.A, mostly new members. “We are going to use spells that are restricted to fifth year and below students, as this is just a demonstration. In a real duel, with actual Death Eaters, you would want to use a better caliber of spells.”

Astoria stood, a bit nervous, but determined, hoping to show herself worthy of Harry’s faith in her to take part of this demonstration.

“Ready Astoria?” asked Harry and Astoria nodded. “On the count of three, we duel. One, Two, Three.”

“STUPEFY!” shouted Astoria suddenly, hoping to catch Harry off guard, but Harry blocked the spell, before he sent a jelly legs jinx at her. Astoria blocked that, before she attempted to disarm Harry. Harry evaded the attack and two more spells were sent at the fifth year girl. “PROTEGO!”

The spells hit the shield and Harry whipped his wand, in an attempt to shatter the shield, but Astoria had already removed it and moved over slightly, to send another attack at Harry. It was a full body bind and Harry blocked the spell, before he returned fire with one of his own. Astoria avoided it and sent a blinding blast of light towards Harry to shield his vision. Unfortunately for her, Harry had the presence of mind to shield his eyes.

“Impedimenta!” shouted Astoria in an attempt to slow Harry down but Harry avoided it. Harry banished an empty chair towards her. “REDUCTO!”

The chair was blown to bits before it smashed into Astoria. She blasted ropes from her wand in an attempt to tie Harry up, but he managed to slice the ropes before they even touched his body. A stunning spell had just missed her by a centimeter. Astoria dodged

another attack of spells, before she fired a leg locker curse. Harry evaded that and while Harry was getting back to a stance, Astoria knew she had to use the brief

“Expelliarmus!” shouted Astoria suddenly and her eyes widened in absolute surprise when she saw she had disarmed Harry. For a brief second she felt pleased, until she realized that Harry had used a fake wand to lure her into a false sense of security and produced his actual wand from his sleeve. One stunning spell later and Astoria had lost the duel.

“Winner, Harry Potter,” said Luna, if there was any doubt. Harry looked towards Astoria before he revived her and extended a hand to help her up to her feet.

“Are you alright?” asked Harry.

“I’m just glad this was a demonstration and we’re on the same side,” said Astoria, as she shook off the cobwebs before she walked over to her seat.

“You did well enough, but you fell into a trap, always check to make sure your opponent isn’t using a decoy wand,” responded Harry and Astoria nodded as she sat down. She resolved to work harder, if that would have been a Death Eater throwing a Killing Curse, other than Harry throwing a stunning spell, she would not have lived to learn from her mistakes.

“Or a decoy anything,” added Ginny, as the six D.A. leaders laughed, if they were sharing some kind of private joke that no one else go.

“Indeed,” responded Harry as he turned to the rest of the group. “Now, onto business.”

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Ron Weasley was in a foul mood today. Granted, that was nothing new, but he got back the latest Defense Against the Dark Arts essay that he had to write. Harry had marked it as a “D”, with comments like “shows little effort to understand the subject matter” and “ineligible,

poorly constructed explanations". Even though his work was not the best, he still could not believe that Potter would mark him down so badly. Ron already winced that his mother had sent three howlers this year, telling him to pick his grades up. In some cases in fact his grades were so bad that even Crabbe and Goyle were laughing at how poor they are. He needed Hermione back, but she would never talk to him, as far as she was concerned any chair that contained Ron might as well have been empty.

"Potter, always gets what he wants!" ranted Ron suddenly, right as Neville came down the stairs from the dormitory. He paused, before he frowned at Ron. "It isn't fair."

"You know what really isn't fair," responded Neville and Ron looked at him. "The fact you think you're entitled to anything without even working for it. Everything Harry has right now, he deserves. He put his neck on the line, for you and Hermione I mind add, among others, yet you don't show any gratitude. He has a psychotic madman after him and you think you have a right to be jealous of anything that Harry gets."

"No one asked for your opinion, Longbottom," said Ron as he glared at him, but Neville did not back down. The old Neville Longbottom might have, but that was two years ago. Now he would not let a hot headed blowhard like Ron Weasley intimate him.

"Well too bad you're going to get it, be thankful it isn't Ginny or even Luna that overheard you, there might not be enough of you to carry you up to the Hospital Wing," responded Neville calmly. "The fact that you still haven't quite woken up to the fact that there's a war going on and that's just sad. You're jealous of Harry or maybe you're just frustrated because you will always be Weasley sibling number seven in terms of power and importance. A distant number seven, you would think that you would have grown up. Most of Hogwarts hates you and you wonder why."

"Because I saw their precious little golden boy for what he really was, a pompous little prat," responded Ron. "High Inquisitor, prefect, Defense Against the Dark Arts teacher, he would have been

Quidditch Captain too if he hadn't resigned from the team because he was too good to play Quidditch. He makes me sick."

"You know Ron, I always did wonder why Harry even gave you the time of day to be friends with you, even though I didn't have the guts to say it," said Neville. "You were petty, jealous, prone to a short temper, and no ambition at all. Harry worked hard, even though he was constantly made to feel inadequate by Hermione."

"That's another thing, Harry's doing something to Hermione, to make her turn against me!" shouted Ron angrily.

"He's giving her help she needs to conquer a very serious problem, even though I don't think that Harry should ever trust her again for what she did, that's his business and not mine," said Neville. "When you look at you, what you are is Malfoy with red hair."

"I'm nothing like Malfoy!" shouted Ron, growing red in the face at being compared to that no good, dirty, filthy, rotten Slytherin.

"All the times I here Malfoy whining about how Harry gets everything, how he thinks he's special, he's completely like you," said Neville. "Both of you are unwilling to do anything, well at least Malfoy has some ambition, even though it is the kind that will get him killed in time."

Ron held his wand, pointing it at Neville but Neville just responded by standing his ground.

"Fire one spell at me, Weasley and you will be waking up in the hospital wing, I might not be as good of a wizard as Harry or as charismatic as he is, but I know I can beat you without breaking a sweat," responded Neville coolly. "One thing, keep up your attitude about Harry and you will live a very lonely life."

"I will expose Potter for what he is," said Ron, even though a small part of him had realized how hopeless it was. He tried to convince his own mother what Harry was and got nothing but a four hour lecture that his ears still have not covered from. Every time he said

something remotely critical about Potter, he was shut down immediately. "Even if I have to take him down myself."

"You are truly a Gryffindor, Ron," responded Neville in amusement. "Rest assure, you are so far Harry's notice that you're in an abyss, but you try anything cute, and I'm sure there will be more than a few people who will be able to teach you a painful lesson."

Ron looked, as several people were looking at him, like he did something wrong. He turned and walked back up to his dormitories in a bad mood. What did Potter have that he did not?

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"We call this meeting of the Wizengamot to session, my last I might add," said Minister Bones, who was glad she was getting out right now. "My niece Susan has become of age yesterday and thus will take the Bones seat in this court. In today's meeting she will be here as a neutral observer, but from every session after she will be a part of the court."

"On the suggestion of Representative Potter and based on the recent rash of Death Eaters attacks, we propose a mandatory screening of all people entering magical establishments for dark marks," responded Richard Gambon, the Chief Warlock of the Wizengamot. "These mandatory checks will help take steps in securing the safety of our magical community here in the United Kingdom and hopefully take steps to neutralize the influence of He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named."

"What would this accomplish other than causing even more of a panic?" asked Alonso Montague, with a sneer on his face. "I think it's an absurd idea because the Death Eaters will attack regardless of who checks their forearm."

"The plan calls for Aurors to regularly patrol areas such as Hogsmeade and Diagon Alley, to be on call if Death Eaters should be found," said Minister Bones as she exchanged a look at Harry. They knew this act was going to be fought but they had to try.

“Besides, it’s a serious violation of Wizarding rights,” responded an old member of the Wizengamot.

“Only violation of the rights of those foul things who work for that psychotic madman,” said Augusta Longbottom as she looked at the Wizengamot seriously. “I’m behind this measure one hundred percent, show them we can’t be pushed around.”

“It’s a good idea in practice, but it may serve to only stir up trouble with You-Know-Who,” said Francis Bulstrode.

“You might as well just walk up and slap He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named in the face with this, not that Potter has not tried to do this before with those acts he pushed through as Junior Inquisitor,” said Edward Parkinson.

“I didn’t pass them though myself, they were voted through and approved by the majority of prefects,” said Harry calmly without missing a beat. “It’s something that has to be done, just like this has to be done.”

Several members of the Wizengamot on both sides began arguing, for a variety of reason. Harry just sat back. It was obvious that there were more than a few that had something to hide. After about fifteen minutes of everyone talking over each other, the Minister shot her wand in the air several times.

“Alright, I see this isn’t going to be resolved, both sides present their cases well,” said Minister Bones. “The only way to put resolve this today is to put this matter to a vote, so we can settle the issue once and for all.”

“Right, all of those in favor of this act being passed raise your hands,” said the Chief Warlock and a fair amount of hands were raised. “All those opposed, raise your hands.”

Another fair amount, this was too close to call. The tally came out, as Harry scribbled down the names of all the people who voted against this measure.

"The measure is defeated by one vote," responded Madam Bones in a deflated voice and some of the members of the Wizengamot just turned to Harry, with smug looks on their face, as if they were pleased that they achieved some great victory and had defeated the untouchable Boy-Who-Lived.

"A minor setback," muttered Harry under his breath, even though no one could hear him, as he stuffed the piece of parchment into his bag.

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"Well?" asked Ginny as Harry returned from the meeting.

"Defeated by one vote," said Harry calmly, but he did not appear to be bothered at all, before he reached forward and gripped Ginny's hands.

"You don't seem as upset as I thought you would be," commented Ginny.

"Let them have their insignificant victory in this one battle, we're going to win the war and then all of the mistakes of the past will be corrected," responded Harry as he leaned forward. Ginny copied that motion as they kissed passionately. Individually, they were pretty difficult to beat. Together, no one could stop them. The world would be reshaped properly, even if had to be torn down and rebuilt from scratch.

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Astoria walked down the hallways, on patrol as part of her duties as the Auror. She paused as she heard a shriek of a girl in the next corridor. She hastened her steps, but paused to listen to see what was up. She was not going to recklessly go in without knowing what was up with the situation. Assess the problem, before finding the best way to tackle it, that's what Harry taught them in the DA.

"Ah, the whittle Mudblood is going to cry," said the voice of Pansy Parkinson as her gang of girls laughed and there appeared to be a few boys amused.

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"That's what she gets for daring to get sorted into Slytherin, Salazar must be rolling over in his grave," said Leon Yaxley, a seventh year Slytherin prefect.

"Yeah, it's Potters fault, he's trying to corrupt us, but we'll make people think twice for supporting that scar headed half blood," drawled a voice that made Astoria's blood go cold. It was Draco. He appeared to be a part of this. She could not believe that he could sink this low, tormenting first year students.

"Let's give her something to really cry about, Draco," said Goyle with a stupid chuckle

"Yeah, Bulstrode, rough her up a little bit," order Pansy and Astoria decided enough was enough, as she saw that overgrown troll of a girl standing over the poor first year, that was a third of her side.

"What do you think you're doing?" asked Astoria.

"Ah Greengrass, here to join the fun I see," said another girl with a superior expression on her face.

"No, I'm here to tell you to stop what you're doing," said Astoria firmly, as she held her wand, ready to defend herself.

"Look, we're just putting the Mudblood in her place, it's no harm really," said Yaxley in a pacifying voice but Astoria just stared him down.

"This is the type of behavior that makes everyone hate the Slytherin house," responded Astoria calmly. "That's against school rules I might add. I think Harry would like to hear about this. You do remember what the punishment is for assaulting people based on their blood status is."

"So now you're on a first name basis with Potter," said Draco. "Figures, you're nothing but a filthy little blood traitor. The Dark Lord will make you pay."

"The real blood traitors are the people that still submit themselves to a deluded half blood megalomaniac that's only out for himself," answered Astoria and she caught Bulstrode coming from behind her out of the corner of her eye. A stunning spell quickly leveled Bulstrode. Crabbe and Goyle tried to take her out, but being complete goons, they knocked each other out.

"What's going on here?" demanded a cold voice and everyone looked up as Snape stood there, with a humorless expression on his face.

"Greengrass attacked us for no good reason, we were just trying to help that poor little first year student find her way to the library, she got lost," said Pansy in a sweet voice that made Astoria want to vomit.

"Miss Greengrass, you are to come with me," said Snape as he turned to the first year. "You, to bed now, before I put you in detention for being out after hours."

Astoria turned to follow Snape to his office, as the offending parties laughed at her. She wanted to hex the smug expression off of Parkinson's mouth.

"Professor, they were torturing that first year student because of her blood line and then they tried to attack me," said Astoria but Snape appeared to be in no mood for explanations.

"Detention for the next week, Miss Greengrass," responded Snape.

"You can't do that." responded Astoria.

"Do not presume to question what I can and cannot do," said Snape dangerously.

"I'm just stating a fact, Professor, you just can't do it," responded Astoria. "If you won't do anything to punish people who pick on innocents, I'm going to someone who I know will. Someone who put you on probation and if he finds out that you ignored my valid complaints..."

"Fine, no detention then and I will look into this matter thoroughly," said Snape as Astoria just smiled at him, gaining a victory. "But I warn you to watch who you associate with."

"I could give you the same warning, Professor," responded Astoria. "May I be excused?"

"Get out of my sight," responded Snape coldly, the Greengrass sisters, among several others have been giving him a headache, dividing his house and making his job a colossal nightmare. The thing about it was that he knew Potter just sat back, laughing at Snape. He saw the smug look on the brat's face during every staff meeting. Potter was just as arrogant as his father.

Snape hoped that the Dark Lord and Potter took each other out when they had their final battle. His life would be a lot less complicated that way.

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Alonso Montague and Edward Parkinson were having a drink in the Hog's Head bar, to celebrate the proposed new measure not being passed.

"Yeah that Potter thinks he's so special," said Montague as he drank from his bottle of firewhiskey. "Who does he think he is anyway? The bastard love child of Salazar Slytherin and Merlin?"

"Yeah, I don't care much for him, he's rocking the boat too much, but he does have a bit of popularity," responded Parkinson as he took a drink.

"Yeah, but he'd be nothing without that little lighting bolt on his head, nothing but smoke and mirrors," said Montague. "If I would have been there at the Department of Mysteries, Potter would have been in traction."

"Yeah, be thankful that you weren't, because the Dark Lord is not happy with the Death Eaters that bungled that operation," said

Parkinson, who was also not among the Death Eaters who had failed in the Department of Mysteries.

“So how’s the family?” asked Montague, making small talk.

“The old lady’s her usual bitchy self, but Pansy’s doing good, she’s making plans to marry Lucius’s brat straight out of Hogwarts, hopefully it’s for the money, I would have to disown her if she actually loved the little twit,” said Parkinson as he shuddered. “Lucius is a real bundle of nerves lately, with that Downfall...”

“Don’t say his name,” said Montague in a horrified voice. “Every time people mention his name, they end up dead sooner or later.”

“That’s just superstition,” scoffed Parkinson.

“Superstition can often be based in reality,” said a ghostly voice as the two Death Eaters looked up in shock. Standing there was Downfall, who had not been there a second ago.

“AVADA...” said Parkinson but he never finished as a spell struck his chest, slicing his lungs into ribbons. He gave a few more pained breathes before he collapsed, blood dripping from his mouth.

“I’m getting out of here!” shouted Montague as he flipped the table over magically. The table smashed into Downfall but the masked vigilante had not even blinked once the table connected. Downfall magically smashed through the down and advanced on Montague. Montague held his wand and threw a skin shredding curse. It appeared to bounce off of an invisible shield, before Downfall knocked Montague back into the wall. The Death Eater smashed against the wall, several bones breaking. Unfortunately he was still alive.

“Now for your end,” said Downfall before Montague could get finished off, a blue light soared through Downfall. The masked figure spun around and effortlessly blocked the spell that was a second away from connecting. Downfall slowly looked up, before seeing who had sent the spell. “You.”

"The mysterious and illusive Downfall, we meet at last," said Dumbledore who looked serious. "I'm afraid I cannot under any good conscience allow you to continue what you're doing."

"Neither can I with you, Albus Dumbledore," responded Downfall. "But your day of reckoning is not yet at hand. I am offering you an opportunity to step aside."

"I'm afraid that cannot be done, I must put you down before you threaten any more lives," said Dumbledore.

"These lives need to be ended out of necessity," said Downfall crisply. "Leave, this does not concern you."

"I'm afraid this does if you slaughter people without offering them an opportunity for redemption," said Dumbledore as he sent spells to immobilize Downfall. Twenty or thirty years ago, Dumbledore might have been able to put down his adversary easily, but now age had taken its toll and Downfall had avoided each attack with expert precision. "Impressive, you are as fast as you are brutal..."

A yellow light struck Dumbledore in the chest and caused him to spiral to the ground. Downfall was obviously done giving warnings as Dumbledore cashed to the ground, the wind temporarily knocked out of him.

"Time has passed you by Dumbledore, in both philosophy and ability," said Downfall calmly as Dumbledore struggled to get to his feet, but made it somehow. "If you wish for a battle, I will bring an execution."

Another spell was sent this one Dumbledore managed to block by the narrowed of margins. It blasted his shield into shreds but at least he was not hit.

"Just who are you under that mask?" asked Dumbledore calmly but Downfall just turned to stare Dumbledore down. The mask had charms on it to block Dumbledore's Legilimency abilities and also appeared to account for Alastor Moody's magical eye as well.

“It does not matter who I am, but what I can do to you,” responded Downfall coolly as the vigilante moved in for the attack.

That’s Chapter Thirty Five.

Next Chapter, Dumbledore and Downfall duel. Really, what more do you need to know?

See you again early next week. Monday, Tuesday at the latest.

Chapter Thirty Six: Bloodshed.

Before Dumbledore could react, a blast of blue light struck him in the chest. He was lifted off the ground and he smashed hard into a table. He managed to brace most of his impact but it was still not a pleasant way to go down. Dumbledore turned over, his fingers going numb for the briefest of seconds, before he gets to his feet to see Downfall. A blast of green fire was sent towards Dumbledore. Dumbledore deflected the attacks, freezing them and sending the frozen ice to the ground. The masked figure stood there, unimpressed, before Dumbledore send a magically simulated gust of wind towards Downfall. The wind blew towards Downfall, but the robes only moved slightly, not even backing Downfall slightly.

“Pathetic, is that the best the great and powerful Albus Dumbledore could give me?” asked Downfall and a huge blast sent Dumbledore backwards. Dumbledore crashed down to the ground again, wincing as his arm was cut. He had never fought anything like this Downfall before, for the briefest second, Dumbledore wondered if the rumors were true. Maybe Downfall was not human. He shook his head, as he got to his feet, blood dripping from his forearm.

“Your type of magic can never triumph in the long run,” said Dumbledore as he whipped his hand and transfigured a chair slightly, causing it to stampede towards Downfall. The chair moved towards Downfall, gaining a great deal of momentum, before it smashed into the masked vigilante. The chair busted into splinters but Downfall remained standing, as if the vigilante was not affected at all. Dumbledore sent a stunning spell at Downfall, in a futile attempt to stop the mysterious figure. The spell bounced off of Downfall, as the vigilante stood there, before a large spike propelled right towards Dumbledore. A stone shield appeared in front of Dumbledore and the spike stuck it with a solid crash. The stone was cracked and Dumbledore was knocked steps back, to see Downfall standing behind him. Dumbledore was hoisted up into the ground and he winced, as he landed right on his leg. He felt his right hip shatter on impact.

“Fool, you thought you could stop me from doing what was necessary,” said Downfall as the vigilante looked at Montague, who

had attempted to make a get away, but failed due to the fact of having two broken legs and a broken arm. Downfall whipped the wand forward and a black jet of light struck Montague right in the chest. It began to dissolve his internal organs to ooze. Dumbledore struggled up to his feet.

"I understand your anger towards the Death Eaters, but this is not the answer, this is far from the answer, they must serve time in Azkaban, give them time to think of the severity of their actions and offer a door for redemption," said Dumbledore but Downfall just sent another attack towards Dumbledore.

"Redemption, the crutch for optimistic fools, I offer swift, permanent justice for the scum who preys upon the innocent," snarled Downfall roughly as a vicious attack was sent right towards Dumbledore. Dumbledore dodged the attack. "You keep fighting a futile fight and you endanger more than you help."

Dumbledore was struck down by an attack that was similar to getting punched in the face. Once again, the experienced wizard was dropped by his seemingly invulnerable foe. Dumbledore rolled over onto the ground, as Downfall appeared to wait for him to get up.

"On your feet, I want to defeat you when standing," said Downfall but Dumbledore twisted his wand. Several thick ropes flew out and for a brief second, Dumbledore thought it had worked as the ropes wrapped around Downfall. Only for that brief second, as the ropes torn to shreds, with Downfall standing there and another blast sent razor wire. This was far from the harmless ropes that Dumbledore sent. Dumbledore sliced the wire just seconds before it would have cut into him. Two more spells, that Dumbledore barely, by the skin of his teeth, evaded. It was beginning to sink in he was not as young as he used to be. He was every bit of resourceful as he always was and he needed to wait for Downfall to make a mistake, perhaps he could goad the vigilante into making a foolish mistake that he could capitalize on.

"With your abilities, you would be better served on the right side, you could be an asset," responded Dumbledore as he dodged a second blast of fire.

"You egomaniac old fool, I am on the right side, I've done more to fight the Death Eaters than you ever bothered to do and the world would not be in the position they in if it wasn't for you, you're pathetic, you're no better than Voldemort," responded Downfall as several more spells were shot towards Dumbledore, it was obvious that Dumbledore was being worn down slowly and Downfall took great pleasure in showing up. "Your time has passed Dumbledore. You should have just crawled in a hole and died peacefully when you had a chance."

Another high impact banishing charm knocked Dumbledore to the ground. Dumbledore rolled over, gritting his teeth, almost looking apologetic at what he needed to do to stop this menace before it became too much of a problem. Dumbledore reared his arm back before he jabbed his wand. A large blast of magic rocked the entire Hog's Head and sent shockwaves throughout Hogsmeade, even towards Hogwarts and the Forbidden Forest. Downfall was blasted down to the ground, as if the masked figure was hit with an entire convoy of trucks. It was powerful, nearly dark magic, the type that Dumbledore vowed to never use again and a part of him hated Downfall for forcing him to bring that spell out of the mothballs.

Dumbledore looked down at the downed Downfall, heavily breathing, as he held onto the wall to stand himself up. He took a step forward but Dumbledore's eyes widened in shock as Downfall sat up, before the masked figure rose to a standing position and stared down Dumbledore.

"You will regret not using a Killing Curse, Dumbledore," responded Downfall coldly, as a concealed dart was removed from the silver glove. The dart was shot at Dumbledore at the speed of light and impacted the shoulder. Dumbledore winced as he dropped to his knees. He felt his limbs go weak. "That won't kill you Dumbledore, although by all rights it should. Rest assure, your demise will come when its time."

"Just who are you?" asked Dumbledore weakly, as he looked up at this mysterious figure, while thinking the one good thing about being paralyzed

"I'm what you don't have the guts to be," responded Downfall crisply, and Dumbledore looked up a few seconds later. Downfall was gone, without any noise.

"We need to get you out of here, Albus, the Aurors are on the way," said Aberforth with a barely suppressed smirk as he walked from the back room where he was enjoying the show for a safe distance.

"They're here now, my side pocket has a Portkey to a safe house, it can't reach it, contact Severus immediately once I'm to a safe place," said Albus in a delirious voice and Aberforth nodded, as he quickly removed the Portkey, before shoving it in his brother's hand. Seconds later, Albus disappeared as the Aurors broke down the doors, as Aberforth turned to face them.

"I'm afraid they managed to get away," said Aberforth as he could see both frustration and a resigned look on the face of Rufus Scrimgeour. Once again, Downfall had eluded the Ministry of Magic and not only that, Dumbledore as well. Minister Bones was very interested in what Dumbledore was up to, as it was becoming increasingly difficult to keep tabs on the old man after he had disappeared from the public eye. It was almost certain that he was up to something and that was enough with full approval of the Wizengamot to have him visit the Ministry for a chat.

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"Dumbledore tried to stop Downfall," said Daphne in amusement the next day, as she and Susan had walked to the Room of Requirement after a brief prefect meeting.

"Failed dismally from what I heard," added Susan. "I don't know, there was no one in that bar, I think most of the people cleared out rather quickly when Downfall showed up."

"Of course they would, it's obvious that they did not want anything to do with the individual underneath that mask or the mask itself to be honest," added Daphne with a grin. "The word is that Dumbledore might have bit off a bit more than he could chew this time."

"Well it serves him right for sticking his nose where it doesn't belong," said a calm voice and Daphne and Susan turned around to see Harry and Ginny standing right there.

"I do hate it when you two do that," remarked Daphne dryly.

"No witnesses for that battle but there's enough talk going on about what happened," said Ginny.

"You mean the fact that Downfall walked out and Dumbledore had to be helped out," responded Harry with a smirk. "At least that's what I assume happened."

"That's a pretty good assumption, Harry," said Ginny with a smile. "Shame he's not dead."

"In due time, in due time," responded Harry calmly. "Still our latest Wizengamot pretty much showed the true colors of a lot of representatives. You'd think people would be a bit more hesitant to take such a bold stance against something that is meant to deal with the forces dim enough to disfigure their forearms with an ugly mark. That could be hazardous to their ability to stay alive."

"There's always someone Harry, they never learn," answered Daphne as she shook her head before Harry consulted his watch.

"I have to be back to my office until I have to head up to Transfiguration, just in case someone has any questions about my class or Snape comes barging in saying how I ruthlessly pick on his Slytherins," said Harry.

"I'll tag along, I don't have another class until next period," responded Ginny.

"Well I guess I'm not going to get any work done," said Harry with a smile as they both laughed, before they used the Marauder's Map to take the shortest path to Harry's office.

"To your feet, Severus," ordered Voldemort as Snape knelt before him. "What do you have to report to be about the rumors that have reached me about a confrontation between Dumbledore and Downfall."

"The rumors are true, my Lord, I just met with Dumbledore, he appeared to be rather shaken up and had a serious set of injuries, if others were not hovering around it would have been the perfect opportunity for me to kill him," responded Snape even though this was a lie as no one was there but him and Dumbledore but Voldemort just raised his wand, threateningly.

"Fool, you should have killed Dumbledore regardless who was there, you may have just squandered a perfect opportunity," responded Voldemort in disgust and Snape quickly managed to respond.

"Don't worry, my Lord, I have a plan to carry out your task that can't fail," responded Snape in an attempt to pacify the Dark Lord before he started throwing Unforgiveable Curses.

"It had best work for your sake, Snape, you have failed me once to often, if it was not for the quality of your information, you would not be standing before me," responded Voldemort coldly. "More have fallen to this Downfall menace. Normally I'd obliterate the person under the mask in an instant, but Potter is rather resourceful in keeping several steps ahead and not leaving himself open to attacks."

"I'm certain a mere teenager could not cause you such trouble, my Lord, there is no conceivable way that an average wizard like Potter could be Downfall," said Snape but this was the wrong thing to say.

"Crucio," responded Voldemort coldly as he raised his wand and Snape screamed in agony as he hit the ground. He saw the humorless stare, the icy cold eyes of the Dark Lord, as he took great pleasure in torturing Snape. Snape's limbs twitched involuntarily as Voldemort looked down at him maliciously, a cold, disturbed look on the face of the most dangerous dark wizard in the last century. "Do not ever question me again Severus or you will find yourself paying a very fatal price. Do I make myself clear, Severus?"

“Yes, my Lord,” said Snape as he tried to avoid looking even weaker by coughing up blood as he struggled to his feet.

“Good now depart from my sight,” responded Voldemort coldly as he walked out and Lucius Malfoy walked in to face Voldemort. “Ah Lucius, I’m pleased to see you on such a short notice. I have a matter of grave importance to discuss with you.”

“Anything to please the Dark Lord,” responded Lucius with a bow and Voldemort just remained cold, rather indifference to Lucius’s blatant pandering.

“I’m certain, we do have a problem, Downfall, a mild thorn in our side at first, but Death Eaters are getting knocked out right and left, there are even more people who might have joined us without question earlier, who have defied me and refused to join our ranks because the fear of this masked nuisance has been put in them,” said Voldemort. “As much as I hate to admit it, Downfall battled me to a stalemate and just earlier, Severus informed me that he defeated Dumbledore in a duel, leaving him worse for wear. Given the number of Death Eaters he’s effortlessly killed and the fact he defeated a fully transformed werewolf, I’m very disturbed.”

“You are still certain it is Potter, my Lord,” said Lucius carefully and Voldemort turned before he nodded. “Forgive me for asking, but what reason might Potter have for attacking Dumbledore. I was under the impression they were rather close.”

“To throw people off his trail obviously,” responded Voldemort calmly without even missing a beat. “Dumbledore’s in on this, if Downfall wasn’t Potter, Dumbledore would have died. No question about it. You don’t have Albus Dumbledore on the cusp of death and let him go, unless it was something that he arranged.”

Lucius just responded with a calm nod. It was best to just agree with the Dark Lord. Something told Lucius that there was a chance that the Dark Lord was partially right, but also wrong as well. Downfall might not be Potter, but Potter might be connected to the vigilante in some way. Obviously there was no way to know for certain and the

elder Malfoy would be a fool along with a liar to say he was not looking over his shoulder.

“Lucius, do you think some sixteen year old fluke in a mask is more terrifying than Lord Voldemort?” asked Voldemort calmly and Lucius shook his head. “Then why do you, cower in fear, do not lie to me Lucius, I see it in your eyes. You fear for your life, you fear the wrath of Downfall, yet you had no fear when you recklessly threw my prized possession, my diary, that I entrusted to you in harm’s way and got it destroyed. Do you think Potter is more powerful than me?”

“No absolutely not my Lord,” said Lucius with both conviction and fear, out of the fact that he thought the Dark Lord might be losing his mind because of this entire Downfall mess.

“Yet, you fear Downfall, perhaps you doubt that I’m correct in Potter is underneath the mask,” said Voldemort softly and Lucius shook his head frantically. “You are nothing but a spineless fool Lucius, without your gold and your influences; you would not last five minutes in the real world. That much is certain. You are pathetic Lucius, you admit that, correct?”

“Yes, my Lord,” said Lucius dully, who wondered briefly why he put up with such abuse from a wizard who was not pureblood. Then he remembered, the Dark Lord would slowly torture him and then kill him if he tried any rebellion. Death Eaters tried in the past to defy the Dark Lord, Regulus Black being the most notable example and they paid.

“Good, Severus is already entrusted with the task of finishing off Dumbledore as payment for his failures, you Lucius, will have the pleasure of dealing with Downfall,” said Voldemort calmly. “Despite offering a sizeable amount of gold, all of my Death Eaters have folded like a house of cards against Downfall. It’s now your problem. Hire someone who might be competent or perhaps summon up a spine to do the job yourself. Bring me Downfall, mutilated, knocked out, stun, just bring him alive and I will remove the mask, to prove beyond a shadow of a doubt that Harry Potter is underneath. This is your last chance to redeem yourself Lucius and should you fail, you will serve

as a textbook example of what happens to those who fail Lord Voldemort. Is that clear?”

“Yes, My Lord, I live to serve you,” said Lucius, struggling not to have his voice sound strained or forced as he looked down the Dark Lord.

“Good, I knew you would see this my way, but a word of warning Lucius,” responded Voldemort in a low voice, as he looked at Lucius, who looked back, as time seemed to stand still. “Try anything like attempting to flee and your wife and son will replace you in serving as an example.”

Lucius nodded, with a resigned look on his face, when he realized what the deal was. The Dark Lord had assigned him the ultimate suicide mission. Defeat Downfall or suffer the consequences.

Lord Voldemort watched Lucius leave. Despite the damage that was done, he still had an army of dark creatures, including the Dementors which was his most valuable asset, something that not even Potter had the ability to defeat. Still, there could be something done to put the fear of Lord Voldemort back in the Wizarding World and plans were already forming in his mind.

The Wizarding World would learn what true fear was once Voldemort got done with them.

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“Potter, what in the devil do you think you’re doing?” asked Snape as he barged in Harry’s office. Harry sat at his desk, calmly looking back at Snape.

“Sitting in my office, minding my own business, until you saw it fit to barge in without even knocking,” said Harry as he rolled his eyes, it was Halloween, the fifteenth anniversary of that night and Snape just served as an ugly reminder to that.

“Malfoy, you put him in detention every night for thirty days,” responded Snape. “It’s a blatant abuse of power...”

“What punishing someone for hexing a first year student just because she looked at him the wrong way is an abuse of power?” asked Harry calmly. “The little twit’s lucky he isn’t expelled and you’re lucky you’re not fired.”

“Perhaps I should just resign, Potter,” said Snape in an attempt to call Potter’s bluff even though he knew it would not happen. Both the Dark Lord and Dumbledore would be most displeased if they lost their main source of information within Hogwarts and Snape quite frankly valued his life.

“We both know you aren’t in a position to do that,” remarked Harry with a smile as he looked Snape in the eye. “I think there are a few people in this school who think they can get away with murder. I don’t know what gave them this attitude, it’s mostly your Slytherins but I would foolish to admit the other houses don’t have their share of disruptive little problems. Even Gryffindor, actually especially Gryffindor, they are far from innocent in everything, with their attitude that all Slytherins are evil.”

Snape stopped himself, he had almost agreed with Potter.

“As for Malfoy and his little gang of sycophants, I hate Malfoy about as much as you hated my father, Snape,” added Harry. “However unlike you, I don’t take out my dislike on people for no good reason. I’ve let Malfoy get away with lot, perhaps I could be accused of being soft. The thing is, he’s stopped short of causing true injury and he’s nothing but a overblown loudmouth. But you can bet on one thing, the moment Draco or anyone else puts someone’s life in danger, they will be bounced from this school with their broken wand shoved up a very uncomfortable place. I’m the law in Hogwarts and I will maintain order. Including with certain teachers who abuse the privileges they have been granted. Which brings you to the results of your monthly performance review?”

“What monthly performance review, Potter?” asked Snape.

“The one I have to give to teachers who are put on probation, surely you didn’t think that was going to be swept under the rug,” said Harry

and Snape did not respond. It was evident that he thought he was done with this entire Inquisitor business when Umbridge was gone. "It's something that's long overdue and I didn't do this without the consent of the Headmistress."

"Just spit it out already Potter," said Snape in an irritated voice.

"Well, I've reviewed the points you've taken and given along detentions you've given over the past several years. Obviously, you could guess what I've found, the fact that you've contributed to the hatred that Gryffindors have towards Slytherins more than anyone else ever had," responded Harry. "Therefore, I'm afraid you no longer have the privilege to give or take points and put people in detentions without the consent of the Hogwarts Headmistress or High Inquisitor. I feel this is more than fair, given your past performance. However, you better have really good and fair reasons when you come to either of us."

"You think you're something special, don't you Potter?" asked Snape and Harry just responded with a smirk. He knew why Snape was annoyed, Harry was handpicked as Dumbledore's successor, while being lead through by the hand, at least from Snape's point of view, while the Death Eater put his life on the line every night. "You're just an arrogant little boy who would have met his end a long time ago if it had not been for sheer luck."

"And you're just a greasy Death Eater who could meet his downfall if it doesn't watch his tongue around certain people," responded Harry but Snape just turned, obviously not bothering to listen to one word Harry was saying. He could tell Dumbledore but he had long since learned that it would do no good. Everything that Snape would try to tell Dumbledore something about his golden boy, it would pass over his head.

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"A couple more Wizengamot representatives fell to deaths, believed to be the work of the masked vigilante known as Downfall, many well respected purebloods fear for their lives," read Ginny from the latest addition of the Daily Prophet.

"Well they have nothing to fear, unless they are a Death Eater," said Lily, as she sat there, Harry had brought her back out using the Resurrection Stone for some advise on a couple of spell modifications that would serve well against Death Eaters. She enjoyed being out, it was rather boring to just observe everything around her.

"Yes, a few people dropping dead, I'm surprised no one has tied to the fact that no one has seen that it was people who voted down the Dark Mark detection bill," responded Harry.

"Well I'm sure those members of the Wizengamot are looking over their shoulder at the very least," responded Ginny.

"So how's the D.A. going?" asked Harry, who had been unable to stop by within the past couple of weeks, due to his schedule between going to classes, teaching classes, his occasional "lessons" with Dumbledore and Wizengamot obligations. He had not had much of a chance to ask Ginny about it either, due to them being preoccupied with other activities when they were together.

"It's great, everyone's really improving this year, the new recruits are really picking up the spells really well and should be able to be put with the regular group soon," responded Ginny.

"Excellent, all of you have done well it sounds like; I should be able to pop in now and again," said Harry. "Dumbledore's lessons...those are less productive than what you're doing with the D.A. I'm just glad that I'm not relying on him for anything that I can use, even if it is a bit boring to learn stuff that I already know."

"Tell me about it, how does Dumbledore think you're going to defeat Voldemort anyway?" asked Lily as she shook her head. "I can't wait until you kill him, he really has no clue about anything."

"In time, not a moment sooner," responded Harry casually. "Fifteen years ago, today, I can't believe it's been that long."

“Yes, and they just have to celebrate it, celebrate nothing,” added Ginny, with a slight frown. “Voldemort’s been back for about six months, maybe longer, officially according to the Ministry and they still are celebrating a defeat that no longer happened.”

“What do you expect, it’s the Wizarding World, anything to have a feast,” said Harry. “At least the food was good.”

“It always is at Hogwarts, the house elves are really great at what they do,” answered Lily, who was just reminded of another one of her pet peeves about Hermione, when she tried that stupid crusade to attempt to free the house elves, not even bothering to understand. House elves were made to work, that was their purpose. Now the types that abused house elves to make themselves look better, they deserved to have their house elves taken away from them. However, house elves lived to work, to cook, clean, and serve their masters and when Hermione started that stupid experiment, it just showed how ignorant Hermione was.

Also all of the times that Lily heard Hermione compared to her when she was a student, had made her physically ill. The only thing that was similar was their blood and that was it. Hermione was nothing but an egotistical, overbearing, insufferable know it all who took her friends for granted and couldn’t even handle a few lower powered dark arts spells without losing her mind. Lily admired her son, because he was showing an extraordinary amount of patience in dealing with Hermione. Had she been in that position, Hermione would be thrown into Azkaban, where she would not have survived the night. Of course Harry did have his reasons for what he was doing, so Lily could not blame her son too much.

“Riddle’s been quite lately,” said Harry.

“I know, you’d think he’s up to something because there haven’t been that many attacks recently,” offered Ginny and Harry nodded in agreement.

“I still think it’s just leading up to something dangerous, but whatever it is, we’ll be ready for it,” responded Harry.

"We always are," responded Ginny as she curled up next to Harry to continue their work before they called it a night. There was still much that needed to be done.

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Dolores Umbridge sat in her cell in Azkaban. She had been forgotten more or less ever since she had been sent to Azkaban. She was glad for what was going on in the world; it would allow her to remain in Azkaban, more or less beneath the notice of most people who would like to gain revenge on her. She had to admit, she did step on some rather important toes to get where she was. Once the Fudge administration crumbled, most of everyone was either reassigned or terminated from the Ministry. Fudge had apparently fled the country in disgrace after resigning and after her ill advised attempt to attack Potter, she was incarcerated in Azkaban which without the Dementors, it was not all that bad of an accommodation.

"Dolores Umbridge," said a ghostly voice and Umbridge looked around suddenly. Perhaps it was the lack of quality food playing tricks on her mind but she could have sworn she heard footsteps inside her cell. She tried to lay down on the cot to ignore it but a jet of yellow light shot around her, setting the cot on fire. Umbridge's eyes positioned up before she had seen a figure. Rumors were heard in Azkaban much like any other place. She had heard of the mysterious, illusive Downfall and right now she was face to face with the nightmare of many Death Eaters.

"You!" shouted Umbridge as she turned. "GUARDS! GUARDS!"

"They cannot hear your screams, Dolores Umbridge," responded Downfall calmly as the masked figure approached Umbridge. Umbridge's hands were shaking, without her wand, she was nothing. "You cannot escape your ultimate fate. I have not forgotten about what you have done and much like the Death Eaters, you will be punished."

"No, stay away from me!" shrieked Umbridge as she attempted to slam her fists onto the stone wall of her cell, doing anything to break it but this did not work. Downfall advanced on Umbridge with malicious

intentions as she cowered against the wall “What are you? WHO ARE YOU? YOU CAN’T GET AWAY WITH THIS!”

Downfall did not respond but rather pulled out a quill. Not just any quill, it was similar to the one that Dolores had used to punish students during her time in Hogwarts last year.

“You must not question your betters, Dolores,” responded Downfall coldly as the quill was shot right into Umbridge’s neck. The quill impaled itself right into one of Umbridge’s arteries immediately, causing her to collapse to the ground. Umbridge’s limbs twitched violently as Downfall stepped back, blood splashing to the ground. Downfall blasted the cell doors opened and rolled Umbridge’s corpse into the corridor, where the Auror guards could easily find her. “Another mess made by the Ministry cleaned up.”

Without another word, Downfall was gone and Dolores Umbridge had met a disturbing, yet, fitting, demise.

And that’s as good of a place to end this chapter as any, I suppose. Next chapter, we bridge the gap between Halloween and Christmas. We have a bunch of little scenes involving some characters who have not gotten too much screen time recently, a bit of fluff, and perhaps some mindless violence. Fun for the entire family! :)

Chapter Thirty Seven: Encounters

Amelia Bones was a very busy woman since becoming Minister of Magic, especially recently. Death Eater attacks had been rather sporadic as of late, just a bunch of random attacks on Muggles and families who had obviously allied themselves against Voldemort. Nothing with too much of a rhyme or reason, this worried her more than anything. She had tried to limit her advisors to people that she knew she could trust, to prevent confidential plans on Ministry security specifications that can be used against them from being leaked. Mostly it was on a need to know basis, but still, she had managed to catch word of people knowing things that they should have been in no position to know. A great deal of time and energy had been put on a mass evacuation plan in the unfortunate event that Voldemort and his forces had stormed the Ministry. While it was horrifying to think of such a thing it was still a very real possibility.

“Minister Bones!” shouted a voice from outside of her office that caused her to spring up to her feet. She walked over to the door as a Junior Aide entered her office. “Head Auror Scrimgeour wants to see you immediately, there has been a security breach in Azkaban.”

“Who broke out this time?” asked Amelia in a frustrated voice, it seems like there was Death Eaters being broken out every other week, just after they put them in. People were calling for stricter security measures and harsher punishments, to put Death Eaters down permanently. Unfortunately, there was an entire mountain of previous Ministry legislation to overturn, that would take years to do. For reasons like this was why this entire Downfall thing was happening in the first place. Most of it passed during the Cornelius Fudge administration but there was a fair amount of counterproductive legislation from before then as well.

“Actually no one broken out, someone broke in and it’s...well I’ll let Mr. Scrimgeour tell you,” said the aide, her eyes widened and Amelia decided to walk out. All sorts of possibilities came to mind, but she would not think too much about it until she got the official word from Rufus. Amelia saw Rufus, who looked like he aged about ten years in the last few months, standing. “You have some information for me, regarding a security breach in Azkaban.”

"I'm afraid so, Amelia," said Scrimgeour grimly. "It doesn't make sense, you would think there would be some trace, anything to give us a clue for the identity of the person who broke in. The only thing I can find is that there is some circumstantial evidence that the security spells were nullified sometime between eleven thirty and eleven thirty two last night and again just before midnight, so..."

"Whoever broke in wasn't there for more than a half of an hour," concluded Amelia who was rather alarmed at the news she was being given. "Anything to tell us why this person broke inside?"

"I was just getting to that point, one of the prisoners was found dead, Dolores Umbridge," responded Scrimgeour. "She was stabbed in the throat by a blood quill. It impaled right in an artery in her neck. She was killed sometime in between the two times the two sets of break in times."

Amelia nodded, to be quite honest, she had her share of differences with Dolores Umbridge, mainly for the fact she tried to get around Ministry regulations and try to force though lopsided laws that would benefit her and no one else. So her death was not something that she would lose any sleep over. The more alarming issue of course was the fact that someone could breach the security spells around Azkaban with such ease. When Voldemort had done it, he had blown though the security spells with ease, almost as if he was alerting the Aurors around the island to his presence, daring them to come at him. And Amelia doubted very much that there was one Auror in the Ministry right now who could challenge Voldemort.

It appeared that the only person who could challenge him was the person who put Voldemort out of his body the first time around. Amelia hated herself for even thinking that all of the hopes of the Wizarding World rested on the shoulders of a young wizard who had not even finished Hogwarts. Capable yes, but still it spoke rather poorly of the Ministry of Magic.

"Look over Azkaban from every angle, see if you can find anything, anything at all, that might point towards who did this," ordered Amelia swiftly and Rufus nodded. They both had an idea that their vigilante

problem might be behind this but naturally there was nothing connecting Downfall.

"I'll get right on it Amelia, I should have a full report on your desk as soon as possible," responded Scrimgeour and Amelia nodded, as they went there separate ways. At any rate, she had a meeting with the Department Heads within the next hour that she needed to prepare for. She valued their input, as it would be needed to present to the Wizengamot court for their next meeting, to get more detailed security around the Ministry of Magic.

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At the Ravenclaw table in the early part of November, Luna was reading a letter, looking very distressed for some reason. Harry, Ginny, and Neville walked over, with concerned looks on their face.

"What's wrong Luna?" asked Ginny.

"Oh, it's just from Dad, he was attacked by Death Eaters, don't worry he's alright, I don't think they expected him to fight back," said Luna.

"Does he know why they attacked him?" asked Harry but Luna just shrugged.

"Something he wrote in the Quibbler, he's been doing a lot of articles criticizing Death Eaters lately," responded Luna. "Don't worry, it's nothing to do with you, Dad gets people who have had their sense of humor surgically removed at birth all the time attacking him and making threats. It does say that our house was destroyed, which is a shame because I liked that house, but he managed to get out in time, giving them something to remember him by. He's currently staying with friends, although obviously he isn't telling which one's."

"Good, to see he got out safely." said Neville with a smile which Luna returned weakly.

"I agree," said Ginny.

"I do too," added Harry. "Did he mention which Death Eaters attacked him or does he know?"

"No, afraid not, which is a shame, but I think they've suffered enough, they'll be the laughing stock for losing to someone who is seen as an eccentric man," answered Luna, who made a note to ask her father the next time she saw them. "We'll recover, we bounced back after what happened to Mum and we'll survive this as well."

"Of course you will, you'll strong, you'll bounce back, you're a fighter Luna, like all of us," said Harry and Luna nodded.

"Thank you Harry, it could have been worst," responded Luna quietly to herself, as she remembered what happened to Ginny's father and Neville's parents at the hands of Death Eaters. Of course, Harry had his parents taken away from him before he really knew them and had lived with those people for most of his life. While Luna hated thinking ill of others, she was happy when she heard that the Dursleys had met a rather messy end. "Time will go on and so will I, besides Charms class is next, I wouldn't want to be late for that."

The others nodded as Luna made her way to class. She was always good at hiding when she was upset, having to deal with people mocking her along with stealing her things over the first couple of years at Hogwarts. Now those people had died not, mostly due to her roommates maturing a little bit, but also because people feared the wrath of Harry Potter, along with the wrath of Ginny Weasley.

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Hermione sat quietly against the wall in a deserted corridor. She found it often relaxing to be left alone with her thoughts at often times and her thoughts were rather odd over the last couple of months. Her dreams were odd, fragmented, often not able to be explained by a sane mind. She dreamed of a dark brooding figure, attacking Death Eaters, killing them. The figure resembled the descriptions of Downfall from the Daily Prophet. It really terrified Hermione, as she wondered exactly how much damage was done by her use of the dark arts and briefly wondered if she was this Downfall person. The image in the mirror, where she saw Downfall in place of her reflection

had been something that was not be able to be driven right from her mind. Hermione felt the dark thoughts that she had, had been mostly locked away, at least during the day. Her nightmares had been something else all together. Disturbing, no two ways about it, and she struggled with trying to tell Harry and Ginny about her dreams. However, if she did that, Hermione felt in some way she would be letting them down. That she was not trying hard enough to beat her disease. She did read in the Daily Prophet there was some extensive studies being done on the Dark Arts Dependency disease to find a more permanent cure, funded by an unknown part, but it could be years before anything solid was found.

"You know you really shouldn't be sitting out here alone, especially now, there have been a lot of Muggleborns put in the hospital wing recently," said a calm voice and Hermione looked up to see a fifth year student; she was a prefect and had Slytherin robes on. "Harry and Ginny are doing there best to try to discourage these people but they just won't get the hint."

"I know, certain people in this school are like that..." said Hermione as she trailed off. "I'm sorry your name escapes me at the moment."

"Astoria, Astoria Greengrass," responded the girl with a smile. "I know who you are, Hermione Granger, you always seem to be a constant source of controversy in Hogwarts."

"That's putting it mildly," answered Hermione weakly, but she was watching Astoria with a weary eye. "No offense meant but I hope you're not going to hold what I've done in the past against me. Because I'm a little sick of having to deal with this, I knew I made a mistake but I don't like having it rubbed in my face every couple of minutes."

"No, I understand perfectly, you've done some things that people aren't willing to forgive, perhaps they shouldn't forgive them, but at least you're trying to avoid making the same mistakes again," responded Astoria and Hermione responded with a nod. "Look, I've noticed that people look for the simplest explanations, especially in this place. Not everyone, but you'll find a lot of people trying to explain something by what is simplest to them. A lot of people in my

house think that Muggleborns are filth and are the cause of everything that ever goes wrong. A lot of people in your houses think all Slytherins are evil and should be dealt with."

"It all leads to a very stagnant society," added Hermione with a frown. "But why do you care if I get attacked or not?"

"I'm a prefect, it's my job to care," responded Astoria with a frown, she noticed that certain prefects, mostly in her house, had taken their job for granted. "There are people who don't like people like you and you are an easy target well..."

"Because almost everyone hates me because of what I tried to do to Harry and Ginny, hell I even hate myself for that," said Hermione. "Still, my parents told me I can't let these people get to me. Harry told me that too. Yet I just wish they'd understand."

"Some might, but most don't and the people who have a complaint will speak the loudest," responded Astoria. "Now, I think you should get back to your house before curfew. Because these hallways after hours are a dangerous place to be, you never know what's lurking behind a corner."

"Right, and I'm rubbish with a wand anyway," said Hermione in a deflated voice, as Astoria looked at her. "For a Slytherin, you're not all that bad you know."

"Yes, and you're not that bad for an insufferable know it all bookworm," responded Astoria before she paused but Hermione had a faint smile.

"That's the least of what I've been called," said Hermione with a yawn, the potion was beginning to set on. "I did get the feeling your sister doesn't like me all that much."

"Daphne's not the sociable type, unless it suits her, don't lose any sleep over it," responded Astoria with a knowing smile as she waved Hermione off and Hermione walked off. At least Hermione was making an effort to change after what happened. Whether it would stick or not, Astoria did not know and she had no place to judge. Still,

that was more than she could say for certain people who would remain nameless. That blond haired sixth year Slytherin had Astoria frustrated, she still held out hope, but at the same time it was beginning to wane by each and every passable day. He kept falling further and further and so Astoria devoted more time in helping the D.A. She had overheard Harry and Ginny talking about how she was their prize student, she needed to work hard to not let them down. So there was little time to worry about anything else, including her own feelings, especially those that were not being returned.

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"Dementor like symptoms have been noted heavily in villages here, here, here and here," said Harry as he marked a map at his feet with a wand, as Ginny sat right beside him in the Room of Requirement. It was in the latter part of November, turning into December, as Christmas was approaching and Harry thought now was a perfect time to try a little experiment that had been planning for some time.

"I'm noticing a pattern, see that right there, there's a set of caves right there," answered Ginny as she looked at the map.

"That's where the Dementors are, well at least a group of them," responded Harry.

"How is the Ministry explaining it?" asked Ginny curiously.

"A plague I believe, they're working over time to clean up the mess, but it's becoming harder and harder, the Muggles are noticing, especially with the thicker than usual amounts of fog," said Harry as he looked at the map. "The Muggle Prime Minister is irate about this entire mess as well. Minister Bones is doing better in this situation than Fudge had done but the Dementors are a problem. They should have never brought them to this country to guard Azkaban, they've wiped out entire magical civilizations before and I don't even know if Voldemort's quite realized what he's unleashed by giving them free reign."

"I know," responded Ginny as she gripped Harry's hand, as she leaned against him. "Still do you think your plan is going to work?"

"I think it may, but as always I have a backup plan," said Harry, calmly. "It will work, trust me and one the off chance it doesn't..."

"You have a plan, you always have a plan," said Ginny confidently. "Even if you never fail..."

"Voldemort's continued existence is proof to your statement, but flattery will get you everywhere, Ginny," said Harry as he pulled her in close, as they kissed, arms wrapped against each other, as their fingers ran across each other, before they enjoyed the quality time they had alone. Their vision of the Wizarding World was getting more and more closer to reaching completion, as more obstacles were being knocked down. Still there was a lot of work to still happen, but they were much closer than anyone else might from them.

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"Muggles think they're better than us, we'll show them how inferior they are," remarked a Death Eater, as he lead another two into a village. The trio, while not inexperienced wizards by any means, was not exactly high enough to warrant regular contact with the Dark Lord. They were given orders from their master though Yaxley, a senior Death Eater.

"Yeah let's show them, in the name of the Dark Lord," said another Death Eater with a smirk beneath his mask. "On the count of three, aim your wands and release fiendfyre into the village. We're disapparate immediately, but there should be more than a few Muggles being killed."

"Seems to be there are about three Death Eaters who are seconds away from being killed," said a cool voice and the Death Eaters wheeled around fearfully, before their worst fears were confirmed, the thing that all Death Eaters feared in the back of their minds, coming face to face with Downfall.

"It's...how did you...find us?" asked one of the Death Eaters bravely.

"Doesn't matter, we were found," said a second Death Eater.

"Yeah, but let's take this blood traitor out, just think of how much we'll be rewarded by the Dark Lord," said a third Death Eater, a bit bravely as the other two looked at him like he lost his mind.

"You mental, Mendez?" said the first Death Eater and these were the last words that left his mouth as he was struck in the back. Every bone in his back broke, with the bone fragments puncturing several vital organs.

"Two Death Eaters left, oh I'm sorry, one Death Eater left," responded Downfall as another Death Eater was blasted down. The Death Eater landed hard, as his heart sped up, beating at an accelerated rate before it imploded, killing him immediately. Downfall turned slowly to the final Death Eater, the man known as Mendez. "Well, I'm here, by all means, take me out to earn the Dark Lord's favor, although he doesn't care about anyone but himself. Kill me, but you only get one free shot before I put you six feet under like the rest. So make it your best."

"AVADA KEDAVRA!" shouted the Death Eater desperately but Downfall took a half of a step to the side, allowing the spell to harmless hit a tree.

"That was your best shot, pathetic," responded Downfall and Mendez's head was suddenly whipped back. His neck snapped immediately on impact as he dropped to the ground. "Pathetic, really pathetic, no wonder this filth assaults Muggles, they can't handle it when someone is able to fight back against their attacks."

Downfall calmly stepped forward, rounding up the fallen Death Eaters to transport them to the Ministry. The vigilante felt that the Ministry was being done a favor about the Azkaban issue. After all, the Death Eaters could not break out of Azkaban if they were dead. It was a simple solution.

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"Excellent work everyone, you are all improving, even beyond the standards expected for Ministry of Magic Aurors," said Ginny.

“Actually much better in many cases, given the inability of most of the Aurors to even contain the less talented of Death Eaters, most of you would fare better,” added Daphne before she amended when she saw Susan. “Although it’s improved a little since your aunt has become Minister...”

“Actually you should hear some of the things she says about the Auror Department and even some of the things that Scrimgeour says about them, obviously many of them are just there to for the gold they get paid,” said Susan in disgust, despite the fact that Voldemort was back, there were still some people who were only out for themselves and not trying to protect the Wizarding World.

“Tell me about it,” responded Neville, who had overheard his grandmother making similar complaints, remarking that Neville’s parents would be ashamed if they were able to understand how far the quality of Aurors had dropped since their days.

“Well most of them have never fought against real threats before, just providing security for the Minister until recently,” added Luna.

“But, we’re getting off the subject, all of you are improving, Harry would be proud of you all if he saw it, because I know I am and we can speak for the rest of us,” stated Ginny. “Considering this is our last meeting until after the Christmas holidays, I hope you will have a great time over them free of Death Eaters. Practice if you have a chance, but we’ll pick up right where we left off immediately after at any rate. You’re all dismissed, have a good day and next couple of weeks.”

The D.A. nodded, before they filed out of the Room of Requirement orderly, leaving only Ginny, Daphne, Susan, Luna, and Neville who all sat down in the chairs it provided. Luna was the first who noticed that the Room had provided a sixth chair.

“Okay Harry, you can come out from underneath your Invisibility Cloak right now,” remarked Luna calmly and Harry removed his Invisibility Cloak, before he folded it up, nodding his head.

"Harry, how long were you there?" asked Ginny in surprise as Harry sat down in the chair next to her.

"Long enough to see that you were all doing a great job," responded Harry before he rose up slightly, to lean over, kissing Ginny, as the two chairs appeared to fuse together into one, leaving them sitting side by side. "I think this Room has an intriguing sense of humor sometimes."

"And it's too smart for its own good," added Luna.

"I came in here after I got down with my business at the Ministry, the couple more representatives of the Wizengamot have been found missing, presumed dead, but it wouldn't have mattered anyway, as they were stripped of their family seats when their homes were raided, finding all kinds of cursed items," responded Harry. "By a purely anonymous tip I'm sure."

"Yes, a coincidence, just like when that act was passed that said that people could be stripped of their family seats, if they were caught having items that were restricted by the Ministry of Magic in their homes," remarked Daphne.

"Well it is there fault for bothering to get caught," said Susan.

"Just shows you how arrogant some people are," responded Harry, as Ginny leaned her head onto his arm resting it. "Oh, Susan, there's a Wizengamot meeting the day we after Hogwarts ends for this term, thought I'd pass on the message. We need to fill in seats. I'm sure you'll be getting an owl any time now, but I decided to give you the heads up."

"Okay thanks Harry," said Susan. "Anything on who will replace these people who had their family seats taken away?"

"I've heard a few names, most of them I think might actually be good on the Wizengamot, they don't have any ties to Voldemort and believe me, I make it my business to know these things," said Harry. "Of course this is just rumors, but I think we can get people in."

"Then we can introduce that dark marks checking legislation," responded Susan.

"Not for another six months, remember laws that get voted down can't get reintroduced right away," said Ginny. "In time, we'll just have to settle for other means in keeping the Death Eaters in check."

"Right," responded Harry, stroking Ginny's hair and the back of her neck absent mindedly. "If everything goes right, in six months, we'll be ready to put our finishing touches on the final stage of our plan to overhaul the Wizarding World. People will die yes, hopefully the corrupt elements on both sides, but I would be lying if I said that everyone who was of any use would come out safely."

"If it's necessary, that's what we're going to do," responded Neville. "Nothing like Voldemort can ever be allowed to happen again."

The others nodded in agreement.

"It's getting late," said Susan with a yawn. "I still have some homework to get done."

"Besides it looks like you two want some alone time," responded Luna with a knowing smile.

"Yes, so we'll just get out of your way," offered Daphne.

"Okay, but we're going to have one more meeting, I need all of your help for a Christmas present I'm giving Voldemort," responded Harry and Susan, Daphne, Neville, and Luna all looked at Harry like he had lost his mind.

"A Christmas present, to Voldemort?" asked Daphne with a raised eyebrow.

"What are you planning to give him?" inquired Luna with a smile. "Coal in his stocking?"

"Something along those lines," answered Harry, as Ginny snickered behind her hand. "The details need to be worked out, but once we

have our final meeting in a couple of days, I'll let you know the full details of everything."

The other four nodded, as they took the paths offered in the back of the Room of Requirement that lead to their respective Common Rooms. As they left, Harry reached into his bag, before he removed the Resurrection Stone and turned it, causing the form of Lily Potter to appear there.

"Your plan is great Harry, I see nothing wrong with it," responded Lily calmly before Harry could even open his mouth, causing Ginny to giggle.

"Mum, you do realize how creepy it is when you answer a question that I haven't even asked yet?" asked Harry, as both Ginny and Lily were laughing.

"Yes, really, I do," said Lily with a smile on her face, as she watched Harry and Ginny. "Still, it's good, as always Harry."

"I think everything will work, I wish I can see the expression on Voldemort's face when he sees what you've done," remarked Ginny.

"Yes, that should be fun," answered Harry, as he kissed her on the back of the neck, as Ginny sat between his legs, leaning against him.

"Does the Ministry really think that security trolls at Azkaban is going to make one bit of difference when Voldemort has the giants?" asked Lily as she rolled her eyes slightly.

"That's about the best we can hope for with all of this legislation that handcuffs the Ministry's ability to give stricter punishments on Death Eaters, besides the Aurors are needed elsewhere and there can't be too many at Azkaban," answered Harry with a sigh. "The laws don't do anything to protect the people unfortunately, they just protect murderers. A person with a moderate bit of intelligence could exploit this system."

"Or someone with an above average amount of intelligent," amended Ginny with a smile.

“Still putting something like security trolls is just inviting Voldemort to bring the giants over to Azkaban and cause untold damage, not that the prison is holding Death Eaters anyway,” responded Lily with a sigh. “It’s about along the lines of when I tried to become an Animagus.”

“What happened there?” asked Ginny curiously.

“Other than wasting three years of my time to find out that I did not have the potential to be an Animagus, it was nothing special,” said Lily as she shook her head. “It’s often odd how some people can do it and others can’t. Sometimes it’s lack of magical power, sometime’s it’s too much magical power that they can’t channel it into a single animal. Speaking of which Harry, I’m glad you never wasted your time trying, because you really don’t have the potential like I did.”

“To be honest, I gave it a thought briefly a couple of times, but decided against it, becoming an Animagus requires too much time and energy that can be better devoted to other fields of magic,” responded Harry, waving it off. “I guess since I can’t turn into an animal, I guess I’m going to have to settle for knowing all of those advanced spells and dueling techniques.”

“Something tells me, you’ll manage,” responded Ginny as all three of them laughed.

“Still the fact that Wormtail had the ability to be an Animagus and I don’t, that does kind of upset me in a certain way,” responded Harry.

“It is funny how life works out, but what are you going to do?” asked Lily with a shrug. She felt some small amount of frustration, even though she did not voice this to Harry. She was the closest to being back in the physical world, without being completely resurrected. Her soul was tied to Harry by one strand that could only be broken by the countercharm that she developed and thanks to what Dumbledore did, it could only be performed successfully by the Elder Wand. Harry’s plan was moving right on schedule so she would not have all that much time to wait.

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Lucius Malfoy walked towards a foul, disgusting building with mold growing off of the walls. It was one of the seediest magical establishments in all of Britain and even all of the Wizarding World. Still, it would be the ideal place to find some brain dead goon to do his bidding, to set up Downfall for his or her downfall. He was just merely looking for someone who could bait the trap or maybe soften up the vigilante so he could lead a group of Death Eaters in to bring the problem to the Dark Lord, so he could do with Downfall as he pleased.

Lucius dodged as a chair was banished right in his direction, as two men were brawling like common Muggles. He briefly wondered if this had not been such a good idea to come to this place. Lucius paused, holding his wand, as several men stood in a circle, cheering, with glasses of firewhiskey in one hand and their wands in the other.

"Alright you two, that's enough," said a rough voice and everyone in the bar paused, before they backed off in fear. A thick bald man with large arms and a menacing demeanor walked forward. Even the two people in the fight stopped brawling and backed off in fear. "You want to start shit in my place, well you ain't going to live to do it again."

Lucius winced as this man walked forward, wand in hand to shut the doors to prevent the two troublemakers from leaving, before he viciously threw them around. There was some magic involved, but even a pureblood like Lucius had to admit this guy would be pretty formidable without magic. The two men were battered, in a bloody heap. It was not like this man was magically powerful, it was just the viciousness of his magical assaults were rather formidable. Perhaps enough to give Downfall some problems until Lucius could coordinate an attack with the Death Eaters.

"Alright any of you people want to start anything, you can just try, because I'll knock you around like these two idiots on the ground," said the large man gruffly and the other patrons in the bar shook their heads, in a terrified manner. Lucius smirked, but he had caught the attention of the bouncer. "And what are you looking at, Blondie?"

“I’m Lucius Malfoy, the head of the prestigious Malfoy family, with twenty three generations of pureblood ancestry behind me and it would be wise to address me with respect,” responded Lucius in a pompous tone of voice which caused the bouncer to stop, looking at him.

“You either have guts, boy, or you’re the dumbest son of a bitch I’ve ever seen,” said the bouncer roughly and Lucius knew by the uncouth and unrefined demeanor that this bouncer was an American. American wizards were nothing but a bunch of beer swilling, foul mouthed rednecks as far as Lucius was concerned.

“Hey look, guys, the pretty little pureblood decided to grace us with his presence, maybe we should all bow down and kiss his arse,” said one of the patrons as they laughed except for the bouncer who looked humorless.

“Just what are you doing here anyway, boy?” asked the bouncer as he towered over Lucius. Lucius recoiled, he could smell the goon’s putrid breath in his face as he stepped back.

“I’m here on business for the Dark Lord,” responded Lucius but the bouncer snorted.

“Voldemort?” asked the bouncer with a bit of disdain as Lucius looked at him.

“Do you know any other dark lords?” asked Lucius but the bouncer reached forward, grabbing him by the throat, before pushing him backwards. Lucius bounced up immediately, disgusted at being touched.

“You work for that pansy who decided to get himself blown up by a one year old toddler,” said the bouncer with irritation. “If I wanted to kill some little fucker, I would have beaten him with my fists and threw him against the wall until he broke. But I guess, Voldemort can’t do anything without his little stick.”

The patrons of the bar laughed. Lucius decided to keep his tongue, he was surrounded by disrespectful and uneducated Mudbloods, half

bloods, and blood traitors. The type that could rough him up if he made one wrong move, the type of the people that would dare to touch a respected pureblood like Lucius Malfoy. The Dark Lord would teach them the error in their ways soon enough.

"Listen, I wish to offer you a business proposition..." stated Lucius but he was rudely cut off.

"Oh look at the pureblood, throwing around the fact that he's educated by using big words," scoffed one of the patrons.

"Ain't gonna sound so smart when we knock his teeth out," said another man gruffly.

"Yeah look at his hair, all purdy and styled, we don't take too fondly of his type in here," said a third man, as he chuckled as Lucius came to the sudden realization that this lot needed a Hogwarts first year education more than they needed a lesson from the Dark Lord. So uncouth and unrefined, it made him ill.

"Shut the fuck up, all of you!" snapped the bouncer crudely. "All right, you have my attention, you better make it worth my while. If I ain't please with what you're saying, I'm gonna rip open your arms and tear out your tendons before flossing my teeth with them. Shoot, pretty boy."

"Well The Dark Lord has entrusted me with a problem Mr..." said Lucius trailing off.

"Everyone calls me Cemetery, because that's where your next stop is when you stir up shit in my place," said the bouncer, obviously nicknamed Cemetery, as he looked at Lucius. "So the Dark Pussy has given you this little problem to solve, but since you are too much of a bitch to do it yourself, you decided to seek out someone to do your little bidding. Is that it, boy?"

"More or less, your crude words have painted an accurate picture," said Lucius. "I'm sure you might have heard of the vigilante known as Downfall..."

"Yeah, seems like him gave your Master a few headaches when he fucked up a few of his boys," stated Cemetery. "I've heard of this fucker, I ain't got no beef with him, he knows how to kick a man's ass. You ever kick a man's ass? Of course not, because you would be too busy breaking a nail."

"I really think Downfall may be tougher than you Cemetery," said Lucius smugly. "Yeah you heard me, you big dumb troll, I think..."

Cemetery's fingers closed around Lucius's neck. Lucius gasped, thinking that he might have went too far.

"You're angling for a demonstration on the finer points of whipping a man's ass," growled Cemetery, as he dropped Lucius to the ground. "You think that boy is tougher than me. A lot of punk ass bitches have tried to start shit with me, including a few purebloods who thought they could shove me around because of how much gold they had. I'll tell you one thing, they didn't leave this place breathing. Is that clear?"

"Yes, clear, now let me go you d...let me go please," said Lucius; it strained all of his patience to be polite to this thing. "Now I'm willing to pay you gold if you deal with Downfall..."

"Boy, you might be as big of a dumb shit as I thought you were," responded Cemetery. "Two hundred Galleons for the job and I might actually let you walk out."

"Right, that seems reasonable," said Lucius, he had been planning to offer two thousand Galleons for the job, but if he could get this buffoon to settle for less, it would be beneficial for his bank account. "Floo me when the job is completed, but the Dark Lord wants Downfall alive. Break several of his bones if necessary but alive, leave Downfall alive."

"Right, got it, bones broken, no death, ass whipped, the Dark Pussy wants Downfall alive so he can pick him off, got it," said Cemetery. "Now get the hell out of my bar, you're fouling up the air."

Lucius backed off, what Cemetery did not know was that a tracking charm had been placed on his cloak. He also made arrangements for this place to be watched at all times, so he could find out when his hired gun went after Downfall. That was a responsibility he would entrust on Crabbe and Goyle, they would blend in perfectly with this crowd. If nothing else they owed him a couple of favors.

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Trevor Nott walked towards the living room towards a tapping on the window on Christmas Eve. His son had been staying with friends over the holidays. He had not been expecting any post but the owl had a Christmas gift tied to its leg. Nott opened the window, before he removed the gift from the unfamiliar owl and walked over, before he unwrapped the gift. He screamed, jumping backwards, when he saw inside the package was a rubber duck. Nott had a nearly paralyzing fear of ducks after the Department of Mysteries. Once he mustered up enough courage, he saw that there was a note inside the package with the foul fowl. Nott took it with trembling hands.

Just a little gift until you meet your downfall. You should turn around right now.

Nott turned and he stood face to face with Downfall. The Death Eater stepped back, holding his wand, pointing it at Downfall.

"You're friends with Lucius Malfoy," responded Downfall coldly. "What is he up to?"

"I don't know, I swear," said Nott as he aimed his wand for an attack but it was knocked from his hand. A fireplace poker levitated, with hot flames on it, before it aimed right at Nott, striking him in the stomach. He screamed as it burned through his robes and into his flesh.

"The truth or I am a bit lower next time," said Downfall carefully as the fireplace poker hovered dangerously close to Nott's crotch, as he appeared to be unable to move.

"Alright, he hired someone named Cemetery, because the Dark Lord wants to kill you and has given Lucius the responsibility because Lucius failed at the Department of Mysteries, I swear I don't know anymore," responded Nott fearfully. "I swear, don't kill me..."

"Merry Christmas, may you rot in hell during this holiday season," responded Downfall as tinsel was shot from the gloves. Nott laughed at the seemingly harmless holiday decoration that was wrapped around him until the tinsel constricted around him, squeezing tightly and it just got tighter. His wand was kicked out of the way, as each and every one of Nott's bones was shattered, before his windpipe was crushed. The last thing Nott saw was the horrific masked face of Downfall.

Downfall stepped on Nott's corpse, looking down with disdain at the Death Eater.

"If Lucius wishes to speed up his execution, then so be it," said Downfall coldly. "His downfall is long overdue. One by one, until there's no one left, than it will be just Riddle and he will fall as well. The end is here, the plague that is infesting this world shall annihilated. The end is here."

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At the exact same time Nott was being murdered, on a set of mountains, inside a cave, there were Dementors hovering. They had preyed on the villagers below regularly, devouring their emotions and in many cases their souls. It was a great feast to them but they could have more, much more. They grew stronger, much stronger, soon they would be able to overtake the humans in this country. The alliance they formed with Lord Voldemort benefitted them, soon the world would be cast in a shadow as their numbers duplicated with each fresh emotion, each soul. The humans feared them, because they were power beyond anything the humans fight. They tried to keep them on that island, isolated, but the one they call Voldemort had allowed them to get off, given them the opportunity to feast on the fears of countless humans, without limits. Little did this Voldemort know what he done, but the Dementors would not let him know.

The Dementors that resided in this cave were not the only ones in this country. There were countless others and more than a few abroad, although centuries ago, the Ministry had rounded the majority of them up, to guard the fortress known as Azkaban. So most of them were in this country, with a larger group in this cave, waiting until they felt the urge to feed once again, to bring terror to the humans in the villages around them.

The Dementors paused, they sensed humans approaching. Mortals, with fresh emotions, to feast upon, powerful, which were the best type as far as these creatures were concerned. They glided from the cave, the temptation was too great, even it would be several hours before it was time to feast again. They sensed something familiar and powerful about these emotions, something that caused the Dementors to even more tempted. They must taste these emotions, they must devour this soul.

The moment they left the cave, the Dementors were bombarded with several objects. They recognized these objects. It was what the wizards called Patroni, a tool used to protect the humans, as they weakened the Dementors. The Dementors backed off fearfully, but instead of taking a defensive stance, the shapes advanced on them, it was too late. They charged at them, the Dementors had nowhere to go, they were too close.

Several cloaks were ripped open as the Dementors exploded into clouds of mist that were sent in every which direction. Shrieks that could not have been human, echoing in all directions as the Dementors were shredded. They stood no chance. The last cloak fluttered to the ground, before it burst into microscopic dust, hundreds of Dementors wiped out.

The Patroni exploded to reveal a message in the sky for all to see, especially a certain Dark Lord and remained there for at least the next day.

Not even your Dementors are safe. One by one, they will all drop, Riddle.

And there's the latest chapter. Chapter Thirty Seven, as we move the story along to the next big climatic point. Next couple of chapters will be important, as we lead up to the blockbuster Chapter Forty.

Also, a special programming note, the next update will be unlikely to happen until early next week, due to the fact I'll be unavailable this weekend.

And I got far more pleasure writing Cemetery's character than I probably should have given how much of a shelf life this particular character has along with how one dimensional he is. Still it amused me, so...yeah :)

Next Chapter. People die. Fluff happens. More people die. Political maneuvering. Even more people die. Dumbledore meets an old friend/enemy for some advice on the Downfall thing. Did I mention people dying?

Chapter Thirty Eight: Slaughter

"What do you mean an entire cave of two hundred and fifth Dementors was slaughtered?" asked Voldemort in an enraged voice, as the Death Eater cowered against the wall. He took a couple of steps, out of fear but Voldemort looked at him.

"Exactly what I said My Lord," responded the Death Eater who was shaking fearfully as Voldemort stared him down though his slit like red eyes. "You wished for me to gather the Dementors but that cave, the one you said had the most Dementors, it was their sanctuary, wiped out, gone, only a few tattered remains of cloak."

The Death Eater held out the remains, a faint, barely visible mist rising from there. Voldemort took it, as he studied it intently. The closer he was, the more he could here a nearly inaudible, but still present, tortured shriek. It was almost like he could hear the echoes of the Dementors being tortured. He held the tattered remains of one of his most prized weapons. He valued the Dementors, even beyond his followers and to see that a great number of them had been wiped out from some unknown means had disturbed Voldemort.

"How did he do it?" asked Voldemort softly, more to himself than to the Death Eater who had brought him the grisly news. "I was lead to believe he collapsed in the presence of Dementors, trembled before them, Lucius had informed me of that, there should have been no way that he would have been able to handle that many Dementors, much less destroyed them."

Voldemort stood up, which in turn caused the Death Eater to take a step back in fear. Instead of turning towards him, Voldemort turned towards the window, to see the message written up above the cave where the sizeable group of Dementors resided. His face slowly contorted in anger, as he read the message.

"He taunts me," responded Voldemort softly as he turned to the Death Eater, who awaited the word. "The information you have given me is most distressing, but rather informative. I shall inform the other Dementors of this and to tell them to be on their guard for this. They are an essential element for my plans. You may leave."

“As you wish, my Lord,” said the Death Eater gratefully, leaving the presence of the Dark Lord without being punished, especially with his mood as of late was something to celebrate. Still, the Death Eaters lived in fear now more than ever. Each of them had suspected that this Downfall was the cause of all of those Dementors getting destroyed. Whether or not the Dark Lord was correct in his belief that Potter was Downfall was not important right now, it was more important to avoid doing anything to draw attention to themselves. They have all heard that Lucius had been working on eliminating this problem once and for all. For their sakes, he had best succeed with whatever scheme he had cooked up.

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The Christmas Holidays had been rather uneventful. Other than the Dementors and Nott dying because of a tinsel related fatality, there had been very little on the Downfall front to speak of. The Ministry of Magic had been working hard to try to expose potential sympathizers for Voldemort within their midst, only taking a short time off to enjoy the Christmas holidays. The Wizengamot was also stalled, because there were six seats that needed to be filled and while there were potential candidates to fill them ready, some of the members of the court were a little reluctant. Understandable considering the previous five people who had vacated those seats had been exposed as followers of Lord Voldemort. Background checks were in order, but it did have the unfortunate side effect of stalling Wizengamot sessions until those seats were properly filled.

Harry was in the thick of all of that, as people in the Wizengamot argued. Not all of them were Voldemort supporters, just people who were very paranoid about being painted with the same brush if many more people who supported Voldemort were discovered as being on the court. Harry, with the help of his supporters on the court, had managed to come close to getting some more people who he knew would be progressive enough to do what was necessary for the future of the Wizarding World. Even though true change could not happen if Voldemort and Dumbledore still breathed, so there was still much work to be done.

"People are still talking about what happened to the Dementors and its been a couple of weeks," remarked Ginny in amusement, as she sat against Harry on the floor of the Room of Requirement after a D.A meeting, head resting comfortably on his chest.

"Nothing compared to what Voldemort's going though, trying to figure out what happened, they were his ultimate weapon after all," responded Harry as he held his arms tightly around Ginny. "He's going to go insane trying to figure out exactly what happened, trying to find the spell, when only seven people know it and we're sure not going to tell."

"Yes, it should be entertaining," responded Ginny who looked rather amused at the thought of Voldemort wasting countless hours of his time leafing through books. "The lessons with Dumbledore..."

"Dismal as usual, his plan to try to have been extract a memory from Slughorn when he had the real thing all along kind of went down the drain when Slughorn refused to teach at Hogwarts," responded Harry as he rolled his eyes at the extent that Dumbledore would drag something out. "Exactly how stupid does he think I am, thinking that I would fall for such an obvious trick."

"Well to be fair, he does think you're still his naïve little golden boy," answered Ginny before she joined Harry in laughing. "Dumbledore won't see what you have in store for him coming."

"Dumbledore always thinks he's in control, but he has no control, the successor nonsense and all that rubbish he's thinking about," said Harry. "Soon he will learn a very fatal and extremely painful lesson. Then we will be one step closer."

Ginny turned herself, so she was face to face with Harry. Harry had her arms wrapped around her and they looked in each others eyes, the determination that was reflected by both sets of eyes were amazing.

"Together we will rule," said Harry with a triumphant smile, as he held Ginny tightly, barely able to control himself for another moment.

“Together we will win,” added Ginny, as she leaned closer before they kissed. It was a long night, they vowed to make the most of every minute to enjoy it. They kissed, with increasing passion, as they slowly removed the clothes from each others body, the Room of Requirement adjusting to accommodate their every need.

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To say Peter Pettigrew was a bit paranoid because of recent events would be the understatement of the century. Rather he was scared to death, looking over his shoulder every waking moment of his life. Unless he was summoned to stand before the Dark Lord, he spent most of his time, in his Animagus form, cowering like a rat in a hole, in the most literal sense. Death was something that Peter was scared of more than anything else. He joined the Dark Lord partially for that reason but because of the power it offered as well. Still, he managed to convince Harry to spare him years ago, but had Harry not been there, Sirius and Remus would have killed him. There was no question about it in Peter’s mind. Now Harry had captured him nearly two years ago, the only reason that he did not kill Peter in that graveyard was that he was needed to clear Sirius’s name. He had a use but right now Peter had no use whatsoever to Harry.

As for Downfall, Peter was one of the many who agreed with the Dark Lord that Harry could very well be behind this mysterious force that was picking off the Dark Lord’s followers one by one or even actually be the person behind the mask. Despite his cowardly nature, Peter was not stupid, he had observed Harry when he was hiding as Ron Weasley’s pet rat and had seen that he had potential, but for some reason held it back. He might have looked like James, but he was like Lily and there were times where Lily scared Peter. If she had gone dark, there could be few on the other side who might be able to stand up to her. Someone might have eventually but it would be a long time. The Dark Lord had attempted to recruit her several times, in fact both Lily and James, as the Dark Lord had uses for both of them. James turned him down because of his blind loyalty to Dumbledore. To an outside observer, it looked like Lily might have done the same, but she always never seemed to be the type to be a follower.

Peter gave a horrified squeak at a loud pounding sound outside. He sat rigid, as a rat in the wall, trying to get deep in the hole as possible. There should be no way that Downfall could find him in here. Another pounding sound as Peter looked relieved. It appeared to be just the wind but still he remained silent and still for some time. Like many others he hoped that Lucius's attempts to deal with Downfall were successful. As much as he hated to admit it, Peter could not live his entire life cowering in a hole in a wall.

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Rufus Scrimgeour limped into the Ministry of Magic. Several people in the Auror Department looked up, in concern.

"Rufus, what happened?" asked Dawlish.

"The Death Eaters decided to attack me early this morning," grumbled Rufus as he collapsed on a chair, blood dripping from the back of his leg. "Good thing we moved the rest of my family in a safe house under the Fidelius Charm. I'm gong to have to thank Potter for that idea."

"The third attack on top ranking Ministry officials today from Death Eaters," added Minister Bones. "No causalities, but an Unspeakable was sent to St. Mungos today, in bad shape. She will make a full recovery, but the attacks are getting more violent."

"Voldemort's on the ropes," said Scrimgeour trying to ignore the pain in his leg. "That makes him that much more dangerous."

"Too much for my liking, but that group of Dementors being wiped out is a fortunate relief," said Minister Bones.

"Indeed, and this is one thing we can't really take a high ground about, as Dementors are not covered under any Ministry laws, for either people or magical creatures," responded Scrimgeour who seemed relieved almost for that fact. After all, there would not be that many people campaigning for Dementor rights. There was a large group in the Ministry that were very uncomfortable with the fact they were allowed so close to civilization, even among those who grudgingly

admitted they were a necessary evil that the Ministry required to keep in check. Now they had joined Voldemort, it looked even worse in hindsight. "I'm just glad it looks like this year, we finally are getting some new recruits."

"Yes, I heard, nine people who are leaving Hogwarts have expressed interest in becoming Aurors, the most in thirty years, even they took the time out of their holidays to get a Potions tutor to get up to speed with what they needed to know, so they could take their NEWT in that class," responded Madam Bones, who was very impressed. She had a shrewd hunch that Harry had something to do with this, pointing out the fact technically there was no law that stated one had to sit the class to take the NEWT. It was an overlooked loophole, so overlooked that no one had even bothered correct it.

"We'll see how much good it does us in the next three years, when they are ready to join the department, if all nine of them last the training," said Scrimgeour, who was very skeptical if there was an Auror Department left to join.

"You really should see a Healer about that leg, Rufus," said Amelia calmly, as she looked at him. "That cut looks nasty, I'm surprised you even came into work today."

"Never missed a day in thirty years at the Ministry, I'm not about to do so because of a few Death Eaters decided to attack me like the cowards they are," said Scrimgeour gruffly. "Couldn't tell who any of them were, they were masked and I didn't recognize any of the voices."

Amelia opened her mouth to respond but she heard a humming sound in her office. She stepped in, with two pieces of parchment on her desk. She picked them up, before she began to read them with interest. She looked them over intently before she nodded.

"New Wizengamot members should be named today, if everything goes right, background check has been completed, nothing has been found wrong with the most likely candidates," responded Amelia with a nod. The entire Wizengamot issue had slowed the Ministry's ability to run a government down to a near halt. The disgrace of having

Death Eaters in the court was something that the Daily Prophet had a field day with. Then again, if the Ministry did anything wrong at all, it would be something that the Daily Prophet would have a field day. "Meeting with the representatives of the foreign Ministries today..."

Amelia paused, she had nearly forgotten about that unfortunate meeting. The foreign Ministries had expressed their concerns that Voldemort remained at large and given the problems she inherited from Fudge, she could hardly blame them from their concerns. Of course there was circumstantial evidence that pointed towards the fact that many of Voldemort's operations were being funded by other magical governments. Unfortunately, there was no solid evidence to back this up so the issue could not be forced.

Still it was a meeting that she was not looking forward to for a variety of reasons. Some of the leaders of the other magical governments expected Voldemort to be gone yesterday. There was little to be done to convince them this was not the case. The issue of believed giant demolition on a Muggle shopping mall had also weighed heavily on her mind, but only one problem at a time needed to be addressed. This meeting with the foreign ministries came first.

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A group of Death Eaters looked around, nervously. They were not nearly as bombastic as their Muggle baiting and hunting activities as they had been in the past. Mostly so many of their comrades had been slaughtered by the mysterious Downfall. With each passing story, this figure was feared more and more. Many had tried to put a face on the vigilante, but others had stuck true to the belief that there was no way that Downfall could be human. There were many theories, the latest one that was popular in the circles of lower ranked Death Eaters was that Downfall was a possessed demon shadow based on a dark magic experiment gone wrong.

Still the Dark Lord had requested, though the Inner Circle member that had been their contract, that the younger recruits cause as much havoc as possible. The recent Dementor incident had caused the Dark Lord a great amount of anger and thus he was adamant in making the world fear him. Many Death Eaters were a bit reluctant to

face anything that had the power to destroy Dementors but also knew that this was a chance to gain favor with the Dark Lord.

The group walked into the village, a very familiar path to destruction if half of the stories were true. They remained walking, wands held, so far no Downfall. They raised their wands carefully, seeing a house with a family, with three children. Muggles obviously, because they had that awful thing called television. Leave it to Muggles to come up with such a disgusting putrid way to waste time.

"We jump in, kill them, set fire to the house, and put the dark mark over the house," muttered the lead Death Eater as they moved forward.

"Stop me if you've heard this story before," said a calm voice in the darkness behind the Death Eaters causing them to turn around. "A bunch of Death Eaters enter a village, thinking they could have some fun with some defenseless Muggles and meet their downfall."

The Death Eaters moved around, looking around in confusion. They could hear Downfall, but seeing the vigilante with a different matter entirely. There was movement around them, but all of the Death Eaters stood still, not wanting to make a move.

Suddenly, in the blink of the eye, one of the Death Eaters was struck right in the chest with a sickly yellow light. The wizard screamed in agony, as the spell shredded several of his organs. Two other Death Eaters turned around, at the sound of footsteps in the darkness.

"AVADA KEDAVRA!" shouted the Death Eaters suddenly, panicked, inadvertently wiping each other out with Killing Curses.

"Really, this is just sad," responded a voice in the shadows as another Death Eater was struck viciously in the back of the head. A loud crack and the Death Eater fell to the side as the last Death Eater moved around.

"Show yourself," said the Death Eater, but his voice lacked conviction, rather he backed off, looking in the shadows. A masked face was

seen in the darkness. "You can't be human, what are you anyway? How do you keep finding us and killing us?"

"Wouldn't you like to know?" remarked Downfall in a callous voice. "And you're about fifteen seconds away from throwing a Killing Curse at me. I'll save you the time and tell you it won't work. Not now, not ever."

The Death Eater paused, before a spell struck his arm. A loud crack and the arm were shattered, before Downfall stepped forward where the Death Eater could see the figure. The wizard struggled to reach for his wand, but Downfall stepped on his fingers. Seconds later, a coil of razor wire shot out of Downfall's glove. It wrapped around the Death Eater.

"A bit old hat the strangle the Death Eater with constricting razor wire, but forgive me for the lack of originality against the lesser Death Eaters," said Downfall as the vigilante looked down at the Death Eater, who continued to struggle. "Feel free to die at any moment, but really, I'm in no hurry."

The Death Eater felt the wire slice into his skin. Blood dripped to the ground, as the wire constricted tighter and tighter. Downfall stepped back but did not take an eye of the Death Eater completely it was certain he was no longer among the leaving. It was very bad form to leave an enemy for dead, unless it was certain they were dead. Looking down, the Death Eater gave a couple more shuddering breaths, before the wire finally accomplished its deadly deed. Downfall gave the fallen Death Eaters a nod, before the vigilante prepared to round them up one by one. It was just more Death Eaters who had failed.

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Albus Dumbledore shuddered as he made his journey towards Nuremguard. The winds and the rain had added to the atmosphere, as the prison was quite the formidable fortress. There was an argument that it could be considered even more secure of Azkaban and that was even when the Dementors believed. It held one prisoner, who was mostly there by his own choice these days. Albus had

offered him his freedom many times but he had refused. That prisoner was Gellert Grindelwald, the most dangerous and powerful dark wizard that Albus had ever dealt with until Tom had risen to power. It was just that much worse when Albus had realized that he at one time considered Gellert a friend and felt he had enabled his eventual path to darkness. By the time he opened his eyes to do anything, it was too late.

That was the past, almost fifty years ago, as Dumbledore made his journey up to the top most cell. All of the other cells have long since not been occupied, only being used when Grindelwald was at the height of his power. Still after a walk, a long one due to the measures taken against Disapparation and Portkeys inside the walls, it gave Dumbledore time to reflect on events on the last couple of months since Christmas. The lessons with Harry were going well, even if he had to alter his original plans slightly. Horace not teaching had put a snag in those well placed plans. He had two memories regarding Horace telling Tom about Horcruxes. The real one and an altered fake memory that would allow him to test Harry on his ability to gain information by people not willing to give it up. Of course, Horace did not remember giving the perfect memory that was by design.

Still, plans had to change and Dumbledore had long since learned to adapt to the unexpected. He had told Harry about the Horcruxes and had promised to take Harry along once he had “found the next one”. Harry seemed excited about the prospect. He looked like he could hardly wait for that day. Dumbledore would wait a bit longer, before they would retrieve the fake locket Horcrux from the cave. It would coordinate with the plans for Severus to murder him and ensure that the Elder Wand did not switch hands. Dumbledore knew the foul potion that the cave held and what it would do to him. It would leave him alive just enough for Severus to do his duty and it would allow him to work for Voldemort, helping Harry from the sidelines like planned, allowing him to destroy the Horcruxes and take the final step for being Dumbledore’s successor.

“It’s you, Albus,” prompted Grindelwald calmly as he looked up from his “prison cell”. It was about as large as the Great Hall in Hogwarts, equipped with a large bed, with a miniature library, nice carpeting, and nice library. “It’s been a long time hasn’t it. Then again,

manipulating teenagers for your own amusement does take an extraordinary amount of time and energy.”

“Hello Gellert,” said Dumbledore calmly. “I trust you’ve been well.”

“I’m good,” responded Grindelwald shortly. “I doubt this is a social visit, so what’s on your mind?”

“I do have a problem that I need your expert opinion on,” said Dumbledore carefully causing Grindelwald’s eyes to snap up, looking Dumbledore in the eyes. “I don’t know how much news has reached you from the outside world…”

“I do have house elves that bring me the Daily Prophet every day you know,” responded Grindelwald calmly. “I heard about Riddle returning and I still think you should have put him over your knee and spanked him when you had the chance Albus.”

“While Voldemort is a problem, it is not the most pressing one that I have to deal with,” answered Dumbledore. “I trust you’ve heard of Downfall.”

“The mysterious figure who has been killing Death Eaters and a few other undesirables?” asked Grindelwald calmly with a twisted grin as he looked at Dumbledore. “I fail to see how this Downfall could be a problem.”

“Don’t you think that Death Eaters should get a chance at redemption and justice?” asked Dumbledore.

“No,” said Grindelwald curtly.

“It is a similar chance which I offered you, yet you don’t expect others to receive that help?” asked Dumbledore.

“Look, Albus, I wasn’t about to complain for you being naïve when you defeated me,” answered Grindelwald. “And since then, I have certain regrets. Now some of them have to do with my failures, but others have to do with the harsh methods I have taken. These Death Eaters, some of them have done much worse crimes than I have.

They should rot and if this Downfall wants to kill them, well whoever is under the mask should be given an Order of Merlin, First Class.”

“I fear that we are heading down a slippery path if we continue to allow things like Downfall to continue unchecked,” said Dumbledore. “At least the Ministry is making an attempt to contain Downfall, but I feel there is so much more that they could be doing.”

“There is this Voldemort thing that is much more pressing than someone who is in reality making their job a lot easier,” said Gridelwald with a sigh, Dumbledore truly lived in an idealistic world. It prevented him from achieving his full potential and he would only be a moderately above average wizard.

“I hope this is resolved soon, otherwise Harry will have some problems when he takes his destined role,” answered Dumbledore and Gridelwald just turned to Dumbledore, with interest.

“Exactly how is Potter?” asked Gridelwald lightly.

“He’s doing well, falling into his intended and destined role nicely,” said Dumbledore as he looked towards Gridelwald with a calm expression on his face, but Gridelwald had a smirk on his face.

“That’s nice to believe that, but how can you be sure that Potter will do exactly what you want him to do?” asked Gridelwald. “What if he resents what you’re doing? What if he is planning your demise right now?”

“Now, Gellert, I trust Harry with my life, I doubt he would turn against me, he would have done so by now,” answered Dumbledore in a slightly admonishing manner.

“I did hear that statement before, coming out of someone’s mouth, now where was it?” asked Gridelwald in a mock insightful voice as he looked at Dumbledore before he brightened up as if he was struck by a sudden burst of information. “Oh, I know, replace Harry with you and you with me, and we get a similar statement I made to one of my chief advisors months before you defeated me. I think we don’t need to bring up what exactly happened there.”

"Your point is?" asked Dumbledore calmly, with a twinkle in his eye, even though it was forced.

"History has a nasty habit of repeating this self although I doubt that many people would put someone they defeated in a prison cell in a prison that person built," stated Grindelwald smugly. "I'm sure most people who read about you defeating me, they assumed it was a rather permanent defeat. As in death, as that was what people who live in a world based on logic, not there is much to be found in this world."

"Perhaps, Gellert, perhaps," said Dumbledore with a slight smile. "However, I don't think I have to worry about Harry going against me at a crucial moment."

"How do you know?" challenged Grindelwald.

"I just do," said Dumbledore and Grindelwald looked very amused, but Dumbledore was adamant about his belief that Harry would not turn against him. Harry was on the proper path, Ginny was there to help him. He had passed the test with Miss Granger, he had reacted exactly how Dumbledore had assumed he would be.

"If you say so, Albus," said Grindelwald, reasoning with this man was about as productive as talking to a brick wall.

"Now back to this Downfall issue," stated Dumbledore evasively changing the subject, as Grindelwald sat, looking at Dumbledore calmly though the bars of the cell. "I don't think anyone can stop the person under the mask. I'm not even sure the rumors that Downfall is not human would be incorrect."

"Perhaps so, I heard what was rumored in the Daily Prophet after your fight, you just barely escaped with your life," said Grindelwald. "I would just stand back and stay out of Downfall's way."

"Innocent people are being murdered before they have a chance at redemption," said Dumbledore.

"No, only Death Eaters are being killed, it is time that you make a distinction between the two and understand that people like Severus Snape are the exception, rather than the rule in this case," said Grindelwald. "In fact, I'm certain that Snape might not even be the exception anyway. I think his redemption is forced to save his own skin. The true test would be what side he remains on after death."

"Once again, I have my reasons for trusting Severus, as I do when trusting Harry," said Dumbledore.

"Reasons that may be wrong," responded Grindelwald. "You do have my final word on the Downfall issue but if you chose to disregard any of my advice, then this may be the last time we meet. I will see you soon enough in the afterlife, during that next great adventure that you claim that death is."

"If you believe so Gellert, but I think you will be proven wrong," said Dumbledore. "Now I offer you..."

"No, Dumbledore, I'd rather die here," said Grindelwald calmly before Dumbledore could finish his offer. "Reading the Daily Prophet is enough to know the world has gotten even worse since I was at the height of my power. Why are we throwing Death Eaters in Azkaban still when Riddle has proven that he could walk in this place as he pleases and let his followers out? Muggles should have been put under the control of the Ministry, for different reasons than I believed before granted, but because its getting the point where the Muggle Prime Minister might try something against the Death Eaters. A war between Muggles and wizards would destroy this entire country and we both know it. While all the Muggles would eventually get killed if Voldemort's hand was forced, a good chunk of this country would be totaled when the Muggles take us down, along with most of the witches and wizards being wiped out as well, on all sides"

"You paint a grim picture, Gellert," said Dumbledore.

"No, an accurate one, Muggles aren't as stupid as we like them to be, if they aren't put up a leash, they will do something stupid that will doom everyone, magic and Muggle," said Grindelwald. "The same mistakes are being made, they must be corrected..."

“For the Greater Good, Gellert?” asked Dumbledore.

“More or less,” said Grindelwald with a shrug. “I bid you farewell, Albus and I’ll see you next time on the other side of the veil.”

“Good bye, Gellert,” said Dumbledore, who was saddened that despite all of the changes that Gellert had undergone over time, he had still held a slightly callous disregard for human life. One that was sadly shared by many others in the Wizarding World, he hoped Harry would be able to steer the world back to the proper direction once he rose up. He was beloved by many, his name had not been tainted like Dumbledore’s was. Surely people would listen to him if he lead the fight against Downfall?

Dumbledore had not even given one thought to Grindelwald’s statement that Harry would turn on him. The very thought of it was absurd.

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Winter had given way to spring, with the Death Eater incidents increasing slightly. It appeared that Voldemort wanted the world to realize that despite the fact that many of his Death Eaters had been picked off by Downfall, he was not going to stop his plans any time soon. Top ranking Ministry officials who had not joined with Voldemort had them and their families attacked, some multiple times. There were a few deaths, but also many injuries, that overworked the staff of St. Mungos.

“Like all charismatic leaders, Voldemort has found more than a few people to sway on the empty promises of power,” explained Harry during the D.A. meeting one day, a rare time he had been able to stop in.

“True, both sides have people that will never learn the lessons of the past,” added Daphne in slight disgust.

“Even if those lessons are fatal,” inputted Ginny.

“Each and every day when we have a meeting, there are things going on outside these walls, power plays within the Ministry,” said Harry. “None of them are for the good of the Wizarding World, actually, a few might be, but they get shut down immediately by well connected people in the Ministry who refuse to give up their precious power and influence for any number of reasons.”

“Some of those people are dropping but there is even more than you could even imagine,” added Neville.

“Well, that does make sense, given that hiding an entire world from the prying eyes of thousands requires quite a few people and many of those people would be corrupt,” said Luna.

“Still steps are being made,” added Susan. “The Wizengamot is restructured, being more selective on who is on it.”

“The point is that despite all these changes, there are problems that still need to be solved and may never be solved,” concluded Harry, who did not wish to spend any more time talking about the political structure of the Ministry than he had to. Despite the fact that the Wizengamot went along with whatever legislation he proposed a bit better now since certain elements on the court had been forcefully retired permanently, there was still a lot of headache inducing hoops that he had to jump through to even introduce legislation.

“Right now, an aspect that has been improving, but needs to continue improve if we are to succeed in a true battle with Death Eaters when they have nothing to improve, is the teamwork aspect,” said Ginny who decided to move into the purpose of the lesson. “Each of you will be split into two sides, to simulate a battle.”

And that’s what happened; the D.A. was divided down the middle for a simulated battle. Certain concessions needed to be made and limitations imposed, as if it was a real representation of a battle there would be people dead. That would be hell to explain. Still the six D.A. leaders sat back, taking heavy amounts of notes. In general, they were extremely impressed with the teamwork by both sides. Still, there were minor flaws that brought to mind several concepts that

they needed to work on. The remaining months of the year would prove to be productive in correcting those flaws.

“Okay, I believe that is enough for today,” responded Ginny, after gaining the attention of the remaining members of the group who were still standing after an hour of battle. “Great effort overall, today’s meeting is over, see you all next weekend.”

The members of the D.A. filed out as Harry turned to the other leaders.

“I would love to stick around, but things to do tonight,” said Harry as he looked at the time as the others nodded with knowing smiles. “I’ll catch up with you later, Ginny.”

“Okay Harry,” said Ginny as she kissed Harry goodbye, holding him in an embrace for a couple of moments, before Harry turned, as the Room of Requirement had given him an exit.

“Stand by,” said Harry as they nodded, before he disappeared from the Room of Requirement.

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Two figures dressed in Death Eater robes walked across the Muggle streets. They looked over their shoulders, as if they were not quite sure where they were. They moved forward, holding wands in their hands, but in a second, a cloaked figure dropped down. The Death Eaters looked confused, as Downfall approached them.

From the shadows, in an alleyway, Cemetery smirked. He had been hanging around at spots where Death Eaters were known to regularly attack in a hope that he would find Downfall. He could taste those two hundred Galleons right now. Cemetery watched as Downfall had made quick work of the Death Eaters, the boy liked his work that was for sure. With a wand in one hand and a Beater’s bat in the other hand

Downfall stood over the Death Eaters, who had been dropped to the ground. The vigilante paused before spinning around, catching a

Beater's bat that was aimed towards the skull. Cemetery gave a surprised grunt before the bat was levitated off the ground, still tightly gripped in his hand and he was flung right down to the ground. The large wizard managed to land on his feet, before he turned, his bat being destroyed by a well placed Reducto curse.

"Decided to distract me by two Muggles put under the Imperius curse with fake wands and dressed in Death Eater robes," said Downfall crisply. "Thought that could allow you to cave in my skull with a Beater bat?"

"I don't know what you're babbling on about, but I've been paid a handsome sum of money to kick your ass, boy, and that's what I'm going to do," shouted Cemetery as he held his wand, before he blasted a high impact blast of magic towards his opponent. Downfall dropped down, dodging the attack. Another pair of spells and they shattered nearby windows. There were the screams of people, as glass flew everywhere. Downfall removed a coil and razor wire sprung right towards Cemetery. Cemetery dodged the attack, as the wire wrapped around a light post, contracting. "The Death Eaters you killed might have learned to duel under a fancy pants tutor but I learned how to fight on the streets and that's where we are. I'm going to chew you up and spit you out, son."

"You talk too much," remarked Downfall coolly as a pair of Incendio bombs were flung right towards Cemetery. Cemetery dodged the attacks. "Not bad for a dumb as a brick thug with a wand."

"Not too bad yourself for someone who is about to be buried six feet under," answered Cemetery, as fire shot from his wand. A shield of water appeared, absorbing the fire. Cemetery whipped his wrist and glass levitated on the ground, before it shot towards Downfall. Each of the pieces of glass was busted into dust. Downfall was knocked back, as one of the pieces broke through the defenses, the sleeve of the red robes slightly ripped. Cemetery jabbed his wand towards the ground and Downfall was blasted right off the ground. Downfall landed hard, crashing down to the ground. Cemetery levitated a broken piece of the street and flung it down right towards Downfall. The vigilante dodged, the attack as the rubble smashed around the ground. Downfall was knocked against a parked car. "So this is the

punk who has had the Death Eaters running scared. Pathetic, I could have...”

Cemetery was struck right in the back by a spell. The bouncer/hired mercenary was knocked to the ground. He quickly bounced back.

“Alright, who’s the fucker who suddenly became really tired of breathing?” demanded Cemetery who looked up to see Downfall on a broom, looking down at Cemetery with contempt. “What in the f...”

Cemetery was knocked backwards again. The Downfall that he fought had disappeared and he was fighting someone who was a bit more skilled. Not that it mattered, as blood dripped down the jaw of Cemetery.

“Come down and fight like a man!” shouted Cemetery as he threw a Reducto curse, attempting to blow the broom out from underneath Downfall but Downfall dodged. Whoever was under the mask was a natural in the air as more attacks were dodged. Downfall dive bombed Cemetery. The hired thug was caught off guard and an Incendio Bomb was flung right at him. The bomb fastened to Cemetery but before he could remove it, razor wire shot out, wrapping around his chest, further binding it around him.

“A new feature I wished to try out, in about thirty seconds, you will spontaneously combust, providing the wire doesn’t slice you to ribbons first,” said Downfall calmly.

“YOU MOTHER FUCKING BASTARD, I’LL KILL YOU!” shouted Cemetery as he struggled but the wire cut into him as the bomb strapped to him had began to heat up.

“Highly unlikely,” said Downfall before the vigilante raised a hand to wave as Cemetery burst into flames. The fire consumed his body, as his skin melted. Blood with ashes in it dripped to the ground as Cemetery had the appearance of a flaming skeleton for a brief moment. His bones were reduced into ashes and fluttered to the ground.

Lucius watched the battle from the distance, with a group of Death Eaters. He was pleased that Cemetery actually appeared to be working out, that was until a second Downfall showed up and ruined everything. There were at least two and for all Lucius knew, there could have been more.

“Everyone move in before Downfall has a chance to escape, surround and contain, but don’t kill that pleasure will be reserved for the Dark Lord, I’m right behind you,” said Lucius as the Death Eaters moved in quickly. In an instant, Lucius had removed an emergency Portkey from his pocket and activated it, quickly transporting himself to a safe location. He held no hope that the Death Eaters would manage to succeed after what he personally witnessed. If this Downfall went down, there would likely be another one waiting in the wings.

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The Death Eaters moved forward, as Downfall turned, stepping over the ashes of Cemetery.

“Alright Downfall, drop your wand and maybe we can ask the Dark Lord to grant you a quick death,” said one of the Death Eaters boldly.

“No,” said Downfall calmly. “I refuse to believe it.”

“You dare call us liars,” said another Death Eater.

“No, I doubt that Voldemort would even entertain the notion of listening to the likes of you,” said Downfall as two of the Death Eaters were dropped quickly, their necks shattering. Several spells were thrown into the air, but smoke pellets dropped down. A cloud of smoke appeared. These Death Eaters, while not new recruits, were not high enough to warrant the direction attention of Voldemort. They agreed to go on this mission, a fool’s mission, to perhaps have a chance to gain some favor with Voldemort.

One Death Eater screamed, a cloud of magically conjured acid splashed against him. It began to eat his skin and slowly tore through into his internal organs, eating them to nothing as well. Two more

Death Eaters were dropped by the mundane means of having their necks magically snapped. A final Death Eater stood; it was obvious now that Lucius had decided to check out.

“One remains, one will fall, you will pay for Lucius’s cowardice,” said Downfall chillingly as a black light struck the Death Eater. The Death Eater screamed, all of the most horrific memories of his life, including some he had long since forgotten since childhood, played in his mind, amplified by a hundred times. It was worse than the Cruciatus Curse, it might have been worse than being constantly guarded by Dementors. His nervous system shut down as his arms and legs twitched violently. The Death Eater dropped to the ground, giving one last spasm before his body slowly, but painfully, shut down, leaving him a crumpled heap on the ground with his eyes hanging from his sockets by their nerve endings.

Downfall looked at the fallen Death Eaters, with a nod.

“Lucius, soon, it will be your downfall, you can’t avoid me forever,” stated Downfall calmly as the vigilante made preparations to transport the Death Eaters to the Ministry where their families could be properly notified. Providing of course they could be indentified.

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Narcissa Malfoy quickly made her way down to Lucius’s vault in Gringotts, escorted by a goblin. She had heard him arrive at Malfoy Manor not too long ago to pack up some dark artifacts and other valuables that the Ministry had managed to overlook. She knew what had happened; Lucius had failed, just like he had in many other areas in her opinion. Narcissa knew Lucius would stop here to drain his bank accounts and leave her to take the fall for his failures to bring Downfall to the Dark Lord. However, she was going to beat him to it. She would take every bit of gold her husband had and flee the country, start a new life.

As for Draco, she loved her son, but he would be of age once he had left Hogwarts this year. Thus he would have to fend for himself. Narcissa grabbed a sack, with a weightless spell on them and began to pile gold inside as quickly as she could. The goblins gave her odd

looks but considering this was her vault as well as Lucius's, there was nothing that could be said. Technically, she was entitled to everything in that vault, even more so than Lucius since he was a wanted fugitive. At least based on the Wizard laws that the goblins disregarded and basically spat on.

Narcissa had managed to remove everything from the vault. Somehow the bag had just barely managed to contain it all.

"How much for a Portkey to Switzerland?" asked Narcissa.

"Five hundred galleons," said a goblin coolly.

"Get it done within three minutes and I'll give you a thousand galleons," said Narcissa and the goblin nodded, with a greedy smile, nearly tripping over his own feet to get it done. Narcissa managed to walk towards the cart, in a dignified manner, barely suppressing a sneer at how common the goblins acted when extra gold was involved. Once it was arranged, Narcissa took it immediately, with a smile as out of the corner of her eye, she could see Lucius walking down the corridor, escorted by a goblin. He was in for a nasty surprise. That was her last thought as Narcissa felt the Portkey take her to the destined location.

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Lucius walked down, towards his vault, lead by two very surly security goblins.

"Open the vault, goblin," ordered Lucius as he looked over his shoulder. The goblin walked forward opening the vault, as Lucius prepared to remove the Galleons inside. Narcissa could sink on her own as far as he was concerned, as was Draco who proved to be an absolute dismal failure of an heir thanks to Narcissa's coddling of him. He could find a new and much younger woman to continue the Malfoy family legacy.

The vault door swung open and Lucius's eyes widened. There was not even a single Knut in there. He looked to be poorer than a Weasley.

“Oh, and Malfoy, your wife was here just moments ago and she removed everything from your vault,” responded a goblin who looked very amused. “And got a Portkey out of the country.”

“Tell me where she went,” said Lucius who wanted to kill Narcissa for daring to drain all the gold from their vault before he had a chance to do so. “Tell me you meddlesome filthy creatures.”

“I don’t think you will live long enough for us to answer,” said a goblin smugly and before Lucius could even bother to ask what that meant, a Gringotts cart barreled towards him at full speed. Lucius turned and was smacked by the cart, being impaled instantly on it. The cart continued to move, before Lucius slipped off. The Malfoy heir hit the ground with a splatter, blood splashing the wall. The cart slowed to a stop, with a few of Malfoy’s internal organs still stuck to it. Slowly, Downfall rose from the cart, to survey the body of Lucius which was ripped into pieces, with blood dripping from it.

“Another one meets their downfall, guess your escape act was all for nothing, Lucius,” concluded Downfall as the goblins looked at Downfall, before they began to applaud. A couple of them had given the vigilante a salute. The fact that whoever was under the mask had slaughtered so many arrogant humans had made Downfall someone after their own hearts.

Downfall acknowledged their presence for the briefest of seconds before the vigilante was gone.

“Someone get a mop,” said one of the goblins in an unconcerned voice as he looked at the grisly remains of Lucius Malfoy. “Oh and perhaps one of us should write Malfoy’s brat to tell him his father is dead and his mother fled the country with the entire family fortune.”

And we end another chapter with a bang. So much is to be said, but I won’t say it.

Next Chapter is Thirty Nine and then Chapter Forty, where all hell will begin to break loose. We head into the home stretch of the story, I’m guessing anywhere between twelve to twenty chapters, maybe more,

we'll see. The story is over when everything I have plan is done. No sooner.

Chapter Thirty Nine: Movement

Draco Malfoy sat in the Great Hall at Hogwarts, surrounded by his fellow Slytherins, in a bit of a testy mood. His usual necessities from home had not arrived as of yet. They had arrived every morning on schedule since he had started at Hogwarts and he was very upset.

"Maybe the owl got knocked off course," offered Pansy as she looked at Draco.

"Yeah Draco, those owls are only human," cackled Goyle.

"No, stupid, they're owls," responded Crabbe with a stupid chuckle as Goyle looked at him in a confused look.

"I know that, but they are only human, they ain't invincible," said Goyle rolling his eyes as if this was the most obvious thing in the world. Draco turned to look up as an owl flew in his direction. It was not from his parents, but rather it appeared to be from Gringotts. That excited Draco, because he assumed it was some distant pureblood relative who had died and left him something. Draco sat there, with a pleased look on his face as he watched the owl touch down, visions of the gold he was entitled to receive dancing in his head. He reached forward greedily, nearly knocking the owl off the table as he removed the letter from the creature's leg. The owl gave Draco a filthy look but turned to return back to Gringotts.

Draco tore open the letter, with a greedy look in his eyes, as he began to read it. Little did he know that his joy would quickly be harpooned in a matter of moments.

Mr. Malfoy:

We feel it is our duty to inform you that your father, Lucius Malfoy, has passed away as of last night. It is quite the unfortunate incident, as he was at Gringotts, conducting himself in the usual barbaric human manner against us goblins and a rogue cart ran him over. The heroic crusader known as Downfall had controlled the cart that lead to your father's untimely destruction. He was relieved of several of his internal organs and was ripped to shreds. Sadly, it appears that being

an arrogant pureblood wizard does not make one immune from something common as death by impaling. We managed to find most of the pieces of your father and made the proper arrangements to lay him to rest.

Normally this would leave in line to receive the Malfoy family fortune, but it is once again our duty to inform you another snag has occurred to make this impossible. Your mother decided to remove a sizeable amount of gold from the Malfoy vault. As in, every single bit of gold inside and fled the country with the wealth she accumulated. Base on our laws, since your father was still among the living when this happened and she was married to him, she was allowed to do this. It is the policy of Gringotts to inform you this, but it is also the policy to be confidential with our customers. Therefore, we are unable to tell you where your mother had gone. That is her duty to do so.

Finally, while you would normally be entitled to receive the Malfoy family manor, we have taken the liberty of confiscating that to cover the funeral costs for Lucius Malfoy and the cost it took to decontaminate the bank. That leaves your assets at the grand total of nothing.

Sincerely,

Ragnok, Director of Magical Inheritance and Human Liaison Officer,
Gringotts Bank.

Draco looked at the letter, in numb shock. To say he was upset would be an understatement. His father was dead, but more importantly, his mother had fled the country with all of the gold in the Malfoy vault. That meant Draco was poor. That was more horrifying than anything else, it was what he saw when he had went up against a Dementor and now it had come true. It took him a moment to realize that Pansy had been reading over his shoulder. Crabbe and Goyle were also looking but to say they were reading would be giving them far too much credit.

"You're poor?" asked Pansy in half shock, half disgust.

"There has to be some mistake, my father must have had some hidden vault with gold, that he left for me, under an assumed name," said Draco in a horrified voice as Crabbe and Goyle looked at him, slowly scooting away from him as if he was contaminated.

"YOU'RE POOR!" shrieked Pansy loudly, causing the entire Slytherin table to hear it, including most of everyone in the Great Hall. "What kind of pureblood who isn't named Weasley is poor?"

"This isn't my fault you know," said Draco defensively as he looked towards the Gryffindor table where Potter and Weasley were both sitting. They looked at him, they appeared to be trying hard not to laughing about something, as Potter held his arms around her. "It's his fault, Potter's fault, he did this. I know he did."

"Yes, of course, it's Potter's fault," said Pansy in a patronizing voice as she looked as if Draco's very sight sickened her. "I suppose it's his fault too for certain other shortcomings you have."

Draco winced, as Pansy's shrill voice carried throughout the Great Hall and several of the girls, both in Slytherin and outside, pointed to Draco and laughing at him.

"No listen to me, Potter's Downfall, he would be the only one arrogant enough to basically take down respected purebloods," said Draco as he looked around.

"Right, Malfoy, Potter, the Gryffindor Golden Boy, murdered a bunch of people," said a seventh year Slytherin prefect sarcastically. "What kind of idiots do you take us for? Just because you've been a dismal failure of a pureblood wizard, you have to blame Potter for everything. Every single thing that goes wrong in your pathetic life, its Potter's fault. We're getting sick of it."

"It is Potter!" shouted Draco angrily as several of the seventh years looked at Draco in disgust. He was not conducting himself as a pureblood should have.

"Listen here Malfoy, we allowed you to get away with a lot because we represented your father," said the seventh year prefect, looking

Draco right in the eye. "You disgraced the name of purebloods everywhere with your constant childish antics. Don't push us now because Daddy isn't here to save you from getting what you deserve."

Draco finally found the decency to shut up. The vast majority of the Slytherin house was looking at him with disgust, partly because he was now poor, but also how he conducted himself. When his father was around, Draco was allowed to strut around like he owned Hogwarts. Now, with his father dead, it was pretty much accepted that Draco would not be allowed to get away with what he used to within the Slytherin house.

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Astoria Greengrass watched the situation involving Draco closely. To be honest, lately, she had seen Draco involved in things that did not make her comfortable in any way whatsoever. She found it rather hard to justify these things. Perhaps at one time she could have accepted the fact that Draco had been pressured into doing these things. The more she thought about it, the less she accepted this was the case. Draco had taken great joy in flaunting his wealth and his status, while looking down on those who he perceived to be less than him. Not only that, but he appeared to be joyously counting down to when he became of age. The moment where he could join Voldemort. It was amazing, despite all that came out about Voldemort, Draco appeared to be obsessed with joining him and being one of his followers.

The way he conducted himself was rather embarrassing as well. He acted nothing like a pureblood should have. Harry had acted more like a pureblood should have and he spent ten years with the worst type of Muggles, the personification of how the purists saw them. Draco had acted rather childish and did not conduct himself in a very dignified manner.

Yet somehow, Astoria held out hope, but the barest of measures, that this recent shock would change Draco. It would force him to grow up, to reevaluate his life. The way he stormed from the Slytherin table, instead of turning and walking away like a dignified pureblood should

had proven this hope was something that she may have to let go of. Certain things about his personality were beginning to make Astoria wonder why she had even liked him in the first place. Perhaps she had begun to see things differently recently, ever since she had joined the D.A. she had been looking at many things about the Wizarding World in a different light. At one time, she thought Draco was the way he was because his father forced to. As time went on, Astoria wondered if Daphne had not been right, in her claim that Draco was a pathetic waste of humanity with no redeeming qualities whatsoever.

Time would only tell if losing every knut to his name would change Draco for the better. Astoria just barely held onto the hope that it might happen, but at the same time, she would not put her life on hold just to wait for Draco to see the light.

Nevertheless, Draco walked by, where Hermione Granger was standing there, with a bit of a smile on her face. If anyone deserved to be taken down a peg, it was Draco. Well actually, she thought Ron deserved to be taken down more, but one could not be taken down from nothing.

"So, Malfoy how does it finally feel to be hated by everyone," said Hermione calmly causing Draco to turn around, glaring at her. "It's in the Daily Prophet by now, even if your harpy of a girlfriend hadn't told everyone by her shrieking."

"I'm not in the mood for it Mudblood," said Draco.

"Too bad, because all of the times you decided to look down on someone, it has all come back to bite you," responded Hermione with a triumphant smile on her face, as Draco looked right at her scarred face in disgust. "I got what I deserved, I admit it, but you also got what you deserved."

Draco pulled out his wand, pointing it at Granger.

"You can hex me, but it won't get your gold back," said Hermione as if daring Malfoy to attack her. Malfoy stood rigid, he appeared to be weighing his options, but right now, Harry and Ginny walked over.

"What's going on here?" asked Harry, even though he knew.

"Oh, just talking to Malfoy, giving him my condolences for his father's death," answered Hermione, who was glad that Lucius was killed, even though she was quite saddened that Draco was not taken along for the ride.

"Nice of you Hermione, given your past disagreements," said Harry, as Ginny struggled to keep a straight face. Harry grabbed her hand, as he turned to Malfoy who glared at Harry with absolute contempt.

"You know one day, your face just may freeze that way, Malfoy," responded Ginny.

"You, both of you, you think you're fooling everyone, but you can't fool me," said Draco as he looked at those two.

"What are you talking about Malfoy?" asked Harry as he braced himself for Malfoy making a fool out of himself.

"I know it was you Potter, you're Downfall, you killed my father and others, you're trying to take the Wizarding World down a sewer!" ranted Draco. "Now it's your fault I don't have one knut."

"No actually that's your mother's fault; she decided to relieve your father of all of his money, without leaving you anything," said Harry as he looked at Draco who balled his fists. "Hex me if you want to but you will be expelled with your wand snapped in half."

Unfortunately, Draco managed to keep his temper in check, but he continued to glare at Harry and Ginny. He knew they were behind this, Potter was the only person who could be Downfall. No other explanation made sense.

"And for your information the time your father's death was reported to the Ministry, Harry was seen at the Ministry by several witnesses," said Ginny as Harry nodded in confirmation, with the slightest hint of a knowing smile forming on his face. "Including several respected

pureblood witches and wizards but by all means, call them liars as well.”

Draco stood there. Obviously he did not believe one word Weasley had said, but he would not be able to make Potter pay here. There were way too many witnesses. His hands were quite tied at this moment.

“Just wait Potter, you can’t hide forever, you will get yours in the end,” said Draco in a low voice, with his voice filled with contempt. “You have stepped on a lot of important toes and have crossed too many lines; you can’t go on polluting the Wizarding World forever.”

“The only one who is polluting anything is you Malfoy,” said Harry calmly as right now over half of the Great Hall, including most of the teachers. “Now run along or I will have to put you in detention for disturbing the peace of the Great Hall.”

Draco looked at his enemy, he was so smug, no one believed Draco but he knew Potter did it. Potter was taunting him, Potter always taunted him. Precious Potter, getting whatever he wanted without even deserving it, there was nothing that Draco hated more than people who got things handed to them, especially when they did not deserve it. Potter was the personification of everything wrong about the Wizarding World. He was dragging it into the gutter. It was hoped by Draco and many others that the Dark Lord would finish off Potter and his friends before there was too much damage done. He was trying to change way too much, while the Dark Lord and many others had tried to preserve it from getting dragged down into a Muggle controlled sewer.

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The Wizengamot court was talking excitedly as the members walked out one by one. The new security measures for Azkaban had been officially approved and would be officially made law effective tomorrow. Some of the members of the court doubted very much this would really work in the long term. However the fast majority had voted for this new measure, for the simple reason that it acted to relieve the general public that something was being done to keep the

prisoners inside of Azkaban. There was an amount of uneasiness as several individuals broke out of Azkaban, on multiple occasions and there were fears that the Wizengamot wanted to put to rest. Trained security trolls patrolling the prison, along the Aurors. Not to mention more powerful spells blocking Disapparation and Portkeys. All visitors would be required to submit to a search as well and their visits would be strictly monitored, with a limited amount of time allowed per each visit.

Harry left the meeting, followed closely by Susan and Daphne, who had attended her first meeting as a member of the court today. They walked from the court, to take the main Floo connection offered to the Room of Requirement where Neville, Luna, and Ginny were waiting for them.

“So it’s about as bad as I thought it might be,” said Daphne as she looked around to make sure no one was listening to them. “Have you ever seen so many people talk so much and accomplish absolutely nothing?”

“That’s the Wizengamot for you, although it’s improved recently, but too many laws need to be overturned for real improvement,” said Susan as she nodded at Harry.

“I’m actually pretty happy about the proposed security measures, they will prove my point when I need to make it,” said Harry.

“If it makes you any better, Aunt Amelia didn’t seem to think they would do much good, but the foreign Ministries are leaning on her, they want to boot us out of the International Confederation of Wizards,” said Susan as she shook her head.

“Yeah, like they’ve never had any problems with megalomaniacs wanting power,” said Daphne with a bit of sarcasm in her voice, as they reached the room with the fireplace. Most of the other court members had already left or had other jobs at the Ministry that they needed to go straight to. “These laws that allegedly protect us are going to be the death of us.”

“Unfortunately true, but in time, it will change, just a few more months and we can really get some work done,” said Harry and the two girls nodded, they knew what was coming up. “The next piece of legislation coming in is something that I’m focusing on, rather than fighting for harsher security measures and wasting my time overturning centuries of outdated laws.”

“The legislation that lowers the minimum age to be on the Wizengamot court from seventeen to sixteen, unless you’re the last remaining member of a family?” asked Daphne and Harry nodded.

“Yes, I want Ginny to actually be a part of the court, as opposed to having to be relayed what happened on a second hand basis,” replied Harry as Daphne and Susan nodded. “Obviously I got in early because of the exception and if I worked hard enough, I could have maybe gotten her in but as she rightfully pointed out it would be much easier to allow her to enter the court officially on a new law.”

“Save the actually fighting for more important battles in other words,” said Daphne.

“That’s basically what her reasoning was as well, more or less,” answered Harry as they moved forward. Neville would be replacing his grandmother soon in the Longbottom seat and Harry had a seat reserved for Luna, with someone serving in it temporarily that would relinquish it to its intended recipient. Harry did hear the mutterings of people who thought he was giving preferred treatment to his friends but quite frankly, those were the type of people who would complain about anything he would do regardless.

He stepped back, to allow Susan and Daphne to use the Floo to return to the Room of Requirement before he followed. He had some essays to grade for Defense Against the Dark Arts but he had hoped to make an appearance in the D.A. meeting that was to happen within the next hour. If not, Ginny, Daphne, Susan, Neville, and Luna could more than adequately cover for him.

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Lord Voldemort sat in his stronghold, thinking of several recent plans. Lucius Malfoy being killed had been an unfortunate inconvenience, as his gold was much appreciated. However, Voldemort had other sources of revenue to fund his operations, both within this country and abroad. Someone did not hang their hopes on one person, especially if that one person was prone to failure as often as Lucius was. His death was an annoyance much like several other recent Death Eaters were, but not too unexpected.

He still had a good number of Death Eaters, even if was just over half of the number he had before this Downfall mess. That accursed Daily Prophet article had caused people to avoid any attempts to be recruitment. Granted, there were ways to convince them, but Voldemort preferred willing followers as they were much more fanatical fighters.

Recently, Severus had presented him the plans that would be used to bring Dumbledore down. Voldemort was actually quite impressed with them, they showed promise. He had offered Severus a small number of Death Eaters, both to make sure Severus got the job done and to inspire some fear in the Hogwarts students. Thanks to Wormtail's knowledge of the passageways of Hogwarts, Voldemort devised a way to move followers into the school. It would be perfect timing, as Dumbledore would be inside the school, as he was reported by Severus to be giving Potter lessons although Dumbledore was rather tight lipped at what these lessons contained. Nevertheless, Dumbledore would be at Hogwarts on the Saturday before the final examinations were to begin.

It would be the perfect opportunity to kill Dumbledore and perhaps to capture Potter, but that little element was not in Voldemort's plans for that night. Getting Dumbledore out of the way and perhaps leaving a message that no one was safe from Lord Voldemort's wrath. Then he could turn his attention towards the Ministry and once that was overthrown, he could turn his full attention towards squashing Potter like an insect.

The recent security additions of Azkaban on the other hand were just a minor annoyance. Voldemort felt that in time he could breach them easily, but he was not making that his highest priority, rather he would

allow his Death Eaters to sit, to allow their failure to sink in. Once they were needed, he would break them out but not a moment before then.

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“Sooner or later, Voldemort’s going to go after Hogwarts,” said Harry to the D.A. leaders after another meeting, which had just highlighted the improvements of the various members. He also looked towards the future, out of the first three years of Hogwarts, who would be a great addition to the entire process.

“That’s unfortunately inevitable Harry,” agreed Luna sadly. “The question is, are we ready for it?”

“The Department of Mysteries proved the members of the D.A. could handle themselves in a fight,” remarked Susan calmly.

“Yes, that proved that, but we did catch the Death Eaters off guard,” argued Daphne in a reasonable voice.

“True, but the recent accidents that have all suffered proved that they can be caught off guard again and again, because of their arrogance,” said Susan and Daphne nodded.

“Point well take,” agreed Daphne. “A full force attack on Hogwarts...”

“Won’t happen until Voldemort has control of the Ministry,” said Ginny. “That could give us a bit of time to prepare and perhaps get some more people over to our side who would be against Voldemort. Whether they would be any good in the long run, we’ll sort that out later.”

“I know, Voldemort still has some dangerous Death Eaters at his disposal,” said Neville, as he thought of the Lestrangle brothers, two Death Eaters who were among Voldemort’s most dangerous, who had unfortunately been resourceful enough to avoid meeting their downfall so far. Bellatrix, on the other hand, had a fate that was positively ironic as far as Neville was concerned. He was amused when Harry and Ginny had shared it with the rest of the group. Truly

fitting one hundred percent for someone like her, he could not have thought of a nicer person for this to happen to.

“Yes, he does and he always will have those dangerous until he gets his ticket punched to the afterlife,” said Luna with a nod.

“Working on it,” responded Harry as he still had one Horcrux left to go and it would be a difficult one to eliminate, considering it was Voldemort’s familiar, something that he would never let out of his sight. “The Elder Wand is the highest priority. Looks like Dumbledore is going to take me to the fake locket Horcrux...”

“That he knows is fake,” concluded Ginny with slight disgust at the hoops that Dumbledore was willing to make Harry go through, these sick tests to ensure Harry was ready for his “destiny”. Hermione was perhaps the worst, doing damage that could only be suppressed but perhaps never fully

“Well he did plan his own death, even having to make it a theatrical production like everything else he does with Snape involved and all,” said Harry. “Little does he know that while he will be dying, it won’t be as glamorous as he intended.”

“The fact that he hasn’t even caught on to what you’re doing shows how well you planned this Harry,” said Luna.

“Dumbledore does see what he wants to see, Luna,” responded Ginny. “And he wants to see Harry as his successor and me as his anchor towards the light side. Little does he know nothing could be further from the truth.”

“It’d be funny, if it wasn’t so sad,” said Daphne as she shook her head. “Still back to the matter of the meeting...”

“Yes, whether or not we’re ready for a full assault,” said Harry as while he had the Elder Wand on his mind, this was of great importance as well, perhaps equal importance. “The main reason why we were so successful in the Department of Mysteries is because we had greater numbers and had the element of surprise.”

"I think we stand a good chance," offered Susan. "We are much better than we were then and have more members of the D.A. The teamwork has improved a great amount as well."

"Too true, but we can never be too careful," said Luna calmly. "Voldemort might have another trick up his sleeve."

"If he brings the Dementors here, he's sealing their own fate," said Ginny with a smile that Harry shared.

"The giants are a possibility too," said Harry grudgingly. "However, a last ditch effort, as they tend to be destructive and I doubt Voldemort would want to level the school. He wants to leave it standing as a monument for his victory"

"You've been working on a way to deal with them though," prompted Neville.

"Yes we have," confirmed Ginny.

"It's been slow going, as their hides are thick and there is barely any way to penetrate them, but it can be done, giants have been killed before," responded Harry. "Fred and George have some ideas, but nothing too concrete right now."

"So just throwing things at the wall and hoping if something sticks," said Luna.

"Basically," said Harry with a nod.

"Well the best magical discoveries have been created that way," remarked Daphne. "So maybe that is the way to go."

"Agreed, I just wish I had a better idea, but now the plans to take us though the rest of the year for the D.A., dodging should be touched up on a bit, along with conjuring solid objects to block spells in the heat of battle, and silent spell casting, a must, you won't believe how many adult witches and wizards struggle with that, but if we get that done, it eliminates the ability for your opponent to hear you," rambled Harry, just thinking of several elements that needed to be focused on,

before they moved to the next level. "Of course, I'm open to any other suggestions but that's just what I thought of."

With that, Harry awaited, as they made plans for the remainder of the year that would take them to what should be a rather pivotal summer towards their eventual plans for the Wizarding World. So far everything was going well, but they planned to keep several steps ahead of everyone else. Too much had been done to slip up now.

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Astoria walked down the hallway, rather frustrated. She had tried to talk to Draco, in a desperate attempt to convince herself that she was worthy of her time. He had blown her off, calling her a blood traitor that would get hers in the end. She tried to justify his behavior, but there was little justification of how Draco was acting. He was acting rather arrogant, perhaps even worse, since he had lost all of his gold and his father had killed. He lashed out against the few people in the Slytherin house who wanted anything to do with him. As a prefect, he was abusing his power to punish muggleborns for the smallest of infractions. Unfortunately, much to her dismay, she could not do anything, as technically Draco was enforcing the rules.

"I thought his attitude would improve," said Astoria in a frustrated voice, more to herself. "Losing his father and his gold should have decreased his arrogance. Yet he is worse than he ever was. What did I ever see in him?"

"Well you saw something, perhaps something that you wished to see," said a voice and Astoria turned around to see Hermione standing there.

"Oh hello Hermione, what are you doing here?" asked Astoria.

"Just returning a book to the library," said Hermione. "I wouldn't bother with him if I were you. He will never change, no matter how much you foolishly believe him to do."

"I'm beginning to think that's actually right," said Astoria with a sigh, as Daphne had been telling her the same thing for years, along with

Harry and Ginny recently, albeit in a more gentle way. She could not pinpoint exactly when her infatuation with Draco had started, it seemed like it had always been there as long as she could remember. Now, as time passed, she saw Draco's flaws more than any positives and they were alarming. He was part of the world that Harry and Ginny was working tirelessly to bring down, when they formed the D.A.

"Of course I'm right, trust me, I know," said Hermione. "You think he would be matured by his father's death, but he still lives in the same, simple minded world that he has lived in for the past five years and will continue to live in for the rest of his life, no matter how short it might be. Draco is Draco and nothing can change who he is. Perhaps his father polluted his mind from a young age but that kind of conditioning can't be changed no matter how much you see the potential for something different."

"I know it's just..." responded Astoria.

"You liked him for some reason and thought perhaps there was something more decent than what the rest of the world saw," said Hermione as Astoria nodded. "Trust me, I know. With a few people that is true, but with people like Draco Malfoy, what you see is what you get. Things are not what they seem sometimes but most times they are exactly what they seem."

"You're right, Hermione," said Astoria, it was actually interesting that Harry had said something similar about Draco one time, it was almost uncanny but she brushed it off as being nothing.

"You still cling on to a hope desperately, that he is the one for you, but you learn a painful lesson that he's not," said Hermione and it was difficult to tell whether Hermione was talking about Harry or Ron Weasley. Hermione had barely acknowledged what happened over the past couple of years, other than she made some mistakes that haunted her. There was a distinct improvement, but unfortunately, she would never be the same again. She would have to take the potion for the rest of her life. "Trust me, I've had my share of painful lessons, most of my own undoing, but I've learned not to dwell on

past mistakes but to move on. Even though that doesn't work most of the time, I keep getting haunted by the past."

"I know, but I just wish I was right in what I thought I saw," responded Astoria.

"In a perfect world you would be but there is no perfection in this world," said Hermione, who was a living example of this. The only good thing about this was that at least Harry and Ginny still talked to her in a calm manner, even though they had not interacted with her too much. That was not their fault, they had more important things to worry about than Hermione and Hermione was glad for the time Harry took out of his busy schedule to make the potion that kept her mentally stable. She did not want them to return, she wanted it to remain locked up in her mind. The dark arts had caused her to become something horrific and inhumane, something that she could not identify herself with. It was because of a small moment of weakness that was drawn out over a painful year. "There are no happy endings in the real world."

"True," said Astoria who thought Hermione was being a bit cynical but had no time to really talk too much about it. Besides she had to go on her rounds for prefect duty in a few minutes anyway.

"I'll get out of your way, I have an essay to complete, I know this is hard to believe, but I left it almost to the last minute," said Hermione. "Sixth and seventh NEWT level work is painful, you should consider yourself lucky that you are only stressing out about your OWLs."

"Well, I don't know if lucky is the right word," said Astoria with a bit of a smirk as Hermione just looked humorless.

"Just wait to next year, that's all I'm saying, good luck in surviving your exams," said Hermione, as she turned, she needed to take her potion, before she completed her Potions essay. Snape had to assign something horrible and almost impossible to finish, it would serve him right if something happened to him but it was not up to her.

She did have these odd dreams that she discounted as being constructed by her subconscious. There was no way they had any

bearing on anything that happened in the real world. She was simply not good enough. There was no way she should take them seriously in any way whatsoever even if she was pleased that Death Eaters suffered such horrific fates.

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Harry and Ginny sat in their remodeled room in what was once the Chamber of Secrets. They had just completed preliminary plans for the day that Voldemort would go after Hogwarts. The Ministry was of little importance, that could be rebuilt and it would better serve their plans if it crumbled. Besides, the Ministry had their own evacuation plans that might have a pretty decent chance of working. Whether or not they would succeed when they were actually needed was down to exactly how well the Ministry worked together. Minister Bones intended to make them work and they got a great deal of support from the Auror department, but would it be enough? Only time would tell.

"Excellent Harry," said Ginny as she looked over the plans. "I think this will keep Voldemort pretty much at bay if he tries anything with Hogwarts."

"Then you and I are on the same wavelength, as we often are, but we'll run it by the other leaders, perhaps they have some ideas that could be of value," said Harry as he wrapped his arms around Ginny. "Just think Ginny, soon we will be rid of Dumbledore and then our path towards eliminating Voldemort would be open."

"Yes, then we can worry about shifting the world into what it needs to be," said Ginny. "We might have to take it down, before putting it back up..."

"It will work, Ginny, anyone who tries to stop progress will need to be reeducated or eliminated," said Harry as Ginny nodded grimly. It was unfortunate it had to come to this, but too many people had caused the Wizarding World to fall into the moral corrupt sewer. "As Mum said, we aren't going to win this battle by being nice, idealistic people who follow all the laws and give our enemies the benefit of the doubt."

“Divide and conquer, while causing panic and spreading seeds of distrust,” added Ginny as she kissed Harry.

“Soon it will be ours,” said Harry, as he looked deeply into her eyes, burning with intensity, with desire, with utter passion.

“As if there was any doubt, you played a careful game and now it’s about to pay off,” said Ginny as she looked into Harry’s eyes, as she placed her hands firmly on his neck, wrapping her legs around him, as Harry worked his hands underneath her robes.

“A few bumps in the road, but I’m going to show everyone who opposes me why they should have never underestimated me, now it’s too late,” said Harry, as he leaned forward, feeling Ginny’s breath on his neck, as she looked at him. “Because I’m Harry Potter...”

“And Harry Potter does not lose,” responded both of them in unison, laughing at amusement of a phrase that a good majority of the D.A. had coined. Harry felt it was arrogant, self serving, yet true to a certain extent good enough to use to taunt his enemies.

“Enough talking,” said Ginny, looking deeply into Harry’s eyes, his confidence was quite intoxicating.

“Agreed,” responded Harry, as they kissed, the world around them seemed meaningless for the foreseeable future, as they celebrated their future ultimate triumph, as they helped each other remove the nuisance that was clothes.

A celebration that would be nowhere near as intense as the one that they would share when Harry had sent Dumbledore headfirst into the next Great Adventure and grabbed the Elder Wand to complete the set of the Deathly Hallows.

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Peter Pettigrew shivered, a hellacious rainstorm had kicked up outside. He dreaded the moment that the Dark Lord had summoned him for a meeting, because that meant he would have had to stay in

his human form for an amount of time and left him vulnerable for Downfall.

A loud crash had caused Peter to squeak. More loud crashes echoed in every direction and Peter trembled, before the wall was blown apart. He dodged the debris, as lightning whipped across the sky. The foot stepped on his tail, giving him a loud squeak. Peter trembled as a spell struck him. He was turned into his human form, the painful way and he looked up into the masked face of Downfall.

“NO!” shouted Peter. “STAY AWAY FROM ME!”

“To your feet you traitorous piece of filth,” said Downfall as the vigilante kicked Peter and the Death Eater scrambled, realizing that he did not have his wand on him. “You, I’ve been waiting a long time to deal with you, after what you did.”

“Listen to me Harry, I have no choice, Lily and James...I’m sorry but the Dark Lord would have killed me...” said Peter but Peter was struck down. He fell to the ground, whimpering, blood dripping from a split lip.

“You are truly a fool if you thought justice was not going to get you in the end, Peter Pettigrew,” said Downfall as Peter attempted to transform, but found he was unable to do so.

“Then send me to Azkaban, just don’t kill me,” whimpered Peter.

“You are pathetic, a filthy abomination, a blemish on the human race, get to your feet and look me in the eye like a man, rodent,” said Downfall and Peter scrambled to his feet, knees feeling weak.

“Please Harry, don’t kill me, Lily and James wouldn’t have liked you to become like this,” begged Peter.

“There’s no Harry here, only Downfall!” thundered Downfall causing Peter to step back in fear, but suddenly he found himself unable to move. “You are going to die once I figure out how much you know about Death Eaters that I have yet to uncover.”

Peter whimpered as Downfall attacked his mind. The vigilante did not have to push so hard, but it seemed like Downfall took great pleasure in assaulting Peter's mind, not caring if it was reduced to oatmeal. Tears rolled down Peter's cheeks, as he felt pain.

"Very useful, confirming a few theories," said Downfall.

"Please, don't kill me, I have rights," whimpered Peter, but there was no reasoning with someone like Downfall.

"You have the right to shut up and take your execution like a man," corrected Downfall as Peter was struck with another light that locked him inside his animagus form. Not that he was able to move, his legs felt like they were made of concrete. "You have crimes you are to pay for and I am your judge, jury, and most importantly, executioner."

Peter was picked up by the tail and whimpered. The next thing he knew he was at the zoo. He felt some confusion until he realized that Downfall walked him over to a cage where there was a large ferocious lion, who appeared to be licking his chops at the sight of the fat juicy rat in front of him.

"You are nothing but an appetizer to this creature, however, it appears he will not complain at being handed a free snack," said Downfall, as he dropped the paralyzed rat in front of the lion. Seconds latter, a frantic squeak was replaced by the sounds of skin being torn and bones being crunched. Downfall nodded, the deed was done.

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Severus Snape and Albus Dumbledore sat around a table in the back room of Hogsmeade. Severus's eyes flickered though the window every few seconds, almost as if he suspected Downfall to come in and kill him.

"The plan is in place, Dumbledore," said Snape after a few seconds after Dumbledore had walked him though it. "The Dark Lord has ordered me to sneak several Death Eaters into the school, as an exercise of fear and power."

“Regrettable but it must be done, I just hope there won’t be too many casualties,” said Dumbledore in a resigned voice, this was one of those greater good things. “You are certain that no one has learned of the plan.”

“No one knows but myself, you, the Dark Lord, and Wormtail, who offered his input based on his knowledge of the passageways at Hogwarts,” said Snape, who had told Dumbledore that he should have had those passageways regularly monitored, but of course, Dumbledore just disregarded his warnings. “The Death Eaters only know they are being selected for a mission on that night but will be filled in on the specifics right before they are sent off.”

“Excellent, I will take Harry, telling him that I have just discovered the Horcrux and will suggest that he goes retrieve his Invisibility Cloak, leaving me enough time to inform you and to contact Alastor as insurance,” said Dumbledore calmly. “After I consume the potion in the basin, I will have Harry take me and the fake locket to Hogwarts, where you will then throw a Killing Curse at me. From there I suspect Harry may chase you in a grief induced rage but you must not harm him no matter what. I trust you will find a way to guide him on his journey towards achieving his destiny without him knowing it. Including giving Harry the memories that I have instructed you to give him when it’s time.”

“Yes, if I have to,” said Snape in a resigned voice. Even after death, he was going to be controlled by Dumbledore. “Are you certain this will go off without a hitch?”

“We have gone over the plan several times, I am certain exactly how Harry will react in this case and it will ensure Lord Voldemort of your loyalty, so Hogwarts is not left in the hands of more dangerous parties,” said Dumbledore calmly. “What could possibly go wrong?”

And there we have Chapter Thirty Nine. Chapter Forty should be big and Chapter Forty One might be as well.

Chapter Forty: Backstabbing

Time had passed, with the end of his sixth year at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry approaching, Harry was both excited and rather anxious. The plan that he had been going over in his head and with the leaders of the D.A. ever since he found out that Dumbledore had the Elder Wand and what he had in store for Harry this year was close to being realized. Harry had been planning for this moment for so long that it was just amazing that the day had finally come. Dumbledore had obviously thought to spring his plan on Harry, with his carefully masterminded death at the hands of Snape, coming after when Harry was left with the fake Horcrux.

Of course what Dumbledore planned and what actually was going to occur would be two separate things. Harry would make certain of that. Albus Dumbledore would learn that the person he should have trusted the least was the one among those who he trusted the most. In fact, perhaps the person he trusted the most. There were doubts in Dumbledore's mind about Snape everyday, even if he refused to admit them to himself and others. There was always a chance that Snape could have been playing Dumbledore for a fool. If he could fool Voldemort, then there was an equal chance that Dumbledore could have been the one being fooled.

Harry on the other hand, was the safe choice, the one who could be counted upon to do things the way Albus Dumbledore intended. He was guided by Dumbledore, to rely on Dumbledore, surrounded by people who thought Albus Dumbledore was the greatest thing since sliced bread from the moment he rejoined the Wizarding World. He had a girlfriend who was from a family that never strayed from the path that Dumbledore assumed to be right. Little did Dumbledore know was that Ginny was the one that helped Harry open his eyes, not that he had the potential to do so on his own. Together they accomplished more than anyone could have imagined and in fact, even more than anyone was allowed to know. Separately they were good, but together they were perfect. Perhaps unbeatable, but Harry always assumed that there might be someone out there that might have the potential to beat both him and Ginny. That's why they worked hard to learn as much magic as they could. Even spells that seemed absurd, they all had their uses, with a little inventive though.

Still the time was ticking down on the life of Albus Dumbledore. The Elder Wand would be theirs; Dumbledore would not be a problem any more. That left them the obstacle of Voldemort to eliminate and what remained of his followers, but they would be something they worried about in the future. Dumbledore was the present problem, one that could be eliminated. His own trust at what he believed to be reality would be his own destruction.

Still, when the time come, Harry knew what would occur, Dumbledore would see everything as the mask would be removed, but it would do him no good. Before he could fully comprehend everything that he learned and how much he had been wrong, Dumbledore would be sent on a one way trip to the next great adventure.

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Severus Snape prepared for his role the next day in this plan of Dumbledore's by pretty much assuming the role that business would go on as usual. He had several Potions essays to mark, the usual drivel in most cases, but a few exceptions. Nothing exceptional, but when one had graded so many abysmal pieces of work, even something that vaguely resembled coherent work had looked great.

"Pathetic," remarked Snape as he looked over the essay from a first year Hufflepuff. Granted he had seen worst, but this student had shown no aptitude for mastering the concepts of writing thoughts coherently, much less the subtle science of potion making. He continued to mark the essays, but his mind drifted elsewhere, to this plan of Albus Dumbledore's.

Dumbledore had some plans in the past that would take a lot of luck to work out properly in the end. The Triwizard Tournament was one such plan, as Dumbledore was gambling a lot to assume that the Dark Lord would use it to ensnare Potter in a plan to return himself to life. It did happen, but not without complications. Snape had attempted to convince Dumbledore to use the Dark Lord's weakened state as an opportunity to finish him off for good. Unfortunately, conventional wisdom and logic was something that was too good for the likes of Albus Dumbledore. Dumbledore instructed Snape to

concoct a potion that would bring Voldemort back to health and he did reluctantly. He owed Dumbledore a lot for keeping him out of Azkaban, when the Wizengamot wanted to throw him in and not look back. Still there were times where even Snape felt that Dumbledore was taking advantage of this little thing.

Snape was now to kill Dumbledore. Not that he did not envision doing this when he was particularly annoyed with Dumbledore, but it was still something that he regretted having to do, despite Dumbledore's insistence that nothing would go wrong. Snape knew better, leading Death Eaters into a school, some of them who were mentally unstable after practicing dark magic incorrectly for years and would have no hesitation of attacking innocent people.

A part of Snape wished that Downfall had been merciful enough to kill him before he had to go through with this entire plan concocted by Dumbledore. Still, time appeared to speed up as Snape watched the clock, in a matter of hours, it would be time for Dumbledore to implement his plan involving Potter and the fake locket.

It was not a moment that Severus Snape was looking forward to. Not by a long shot. Still it had to be done.

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Draco Malfoy was in a foul mood. Not that this was anything new, especially as of late. He had been pretty much branded as an outcast by the vast majority of the Slytherin house. Much like Granger had been when she attempted to drug Potter with that love potion. The only thing that was keeping him from behind constantly made a target from some inventive curses was that he still had his prefect badge. He still had power and he could still put people in detention if they had crossed him. His mother had not bothered to contact him once, taking the gold that Draco was entitled to.

Right now he saw Crabbe and Goyle talking excitedly. There had been people talking, mostly children of the Death Eaters who remained, and Draco demanded to know why. He decided to get to the bottom of this, he marched over to Crabbe and Goyle.

“What are you two talking about?” demanded Draco, as he turned to remind them he was a prefect and thus their better.

“None of your business, Draco,” said Goyle with a stupid smirk as Crabbe chuckled. Draco’s father had gotten himself killed and Draco had lost all of his gold. And people called them stupid. He was poor, at least the Weasleys had a few knuts to rub together, Draco had nothing. “It’s nothing that a penniless little nothing like yourself needs to know. It’s none of your business, you ain’t nothing without your father.”

“Yeah, we ain’t suppose to tell you that there are going to be a bunch of followers of the Dark Lord coming in here to put some Mudbloods in their place,” said Crabbe with a superior look on his face as Draco just responded with a triumphant smirk, as if this was some great victory that he conned Crabbe and Goyle out of information.

“I see, well I suppose I’m going to have to put you two in detention,” said Draco smugly as Crabbe and Goyle looked at Draco, in confusion. “For the next week, you will be spending some time with Filch, for badmouthing a figure of authority. Perhaps it could teach you two oafs some respect and some pureblood dignity.”

“Well at least we ain’t poor Draco,” said Crabbe as Goyle joined him in a stupid round of laughter as Draco rolled his eyes. Those two were not exactly bright, it was a wonder that they breathed without constant instruction.

“Make that two weeks, I will not be talked down by the likes of you,” said Draco, as he had finally gotten the information he needed. The Dark Lord had planned an attack on Hogwarts tonight. It was the perfect chance to make himself look good in front of the Dark Lord’s followers, by helping them. It was obvious they were after Potter, there was no other reason they were here. It would be the perfect chance to make a decent impression.

Right now Draco walked down; he was on patrol, looking for Mudbloods who had misbehaved. They would learn the meaning of respect, he knew they laughed at him and worshipped Potter.

It only took moments before Draco found a Muggleborn with a Fanged Frisbee that he was trying to conceal. Ignoring the group of two Slytherin seventh year girls who had levitated the bag of a crying first year Gryffindor, taunting her, Draco marched over to the first year with the Fanged Frisbee.

“You!” shouted Draco causing the first year to turn, nearly dropping the item in question on the floor. He faced Draco, who had a smirk on his face. “What do we have here? A Fanged Frisbee, well those are forbidden at Hogwarts. Then again, your type thinks you are above the rules.”

“No, I didn’t know, there are some many things on that list...” said the first year.

“Ignorance is not an excuse for breaking the rules, even if the people of your blood can be very ignorant,” said Draco as he held his wand and for a few seconds, the first year cowered in fear, expecting to be hexed and if Draco could get away with it, he would. He enjoyed making these ignorant Mudbloods squirm.

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Astoria Greengrass walked down the corridors, it was the weekend before exams, so things were rather quiet, people were either resting before they had to do the exams or trying to cram a great deal of information into their minds over a couple of days, after procrastinating over the past several weeks when they should have been studying. She did curse the random factor of the prefect patrol schedule, pairing her with Draco. Right now, he was the last person she needed to talk to and interact with. She had left early to begin her rounds, to avoid interacting with him as much as possible. Not that he would have cared, he had only used his power to bully others. Harry had decided not to strip him of his prefect badge yet, saying that he was monitoring Draco closely and once he truly stepped out of line, he would be done. In other words, Harry was giving Draco enough rope to hang himself, which made sense in a way.

Astoria walked up as she saw two seven year girls with a bag levitating in the air above them. Seeing the sobbing first year girl, it

was not difficult to put together what was going on. She held her wand out, as the girl was in hysterics and the two bullying seventh year Slytherin girls were laughing. They were the type of people that needed to be eliminated but right now she was going to end this right now.

The bag was summoned gently, allowing Astoria to catch it. The two seventh years turned around, to see the prefect standing with a humorless expression on her face.

"What do you think you were doing?" asked Astoria coolly, but she held her wand. She was fully expecting the seventh years to try something but she was ready to defend herself.

"We were just messing around, really," said one of the seventh years, but even her partner in crime had a look on her face that indicated that she thought this was a poor attempt to act innocent.

"Well I think both of you can have detention," ordered Astoria calmly and the two seventh years protested but she held her hand up. "Unless you want to take it up with High Inquisitor Potter, he is less forgiving with people bullying Muggleborn first years or anyone for that matter than I am."

The two seventh years shut up immediately. Potter had been known to give far steeper punishments than a few detentions. At least two seventh years had been expelled alright, not inside Slytherin, but Hufflepuffs oddly enough, for putting a Muggleborn in the hospital wing with horrific injuries. The Muggleborn made a full recovery but the Hufflepuff students were thrown from the school without any hesitation from Harry.

Astoria walked over towards the first year girl, who was wiping her eyes, red from tears.

"Here's your bag," said Astoria as the first year took it gratefully. "Are you going to be alright?"

"I think so," said the first year. "Why did they do this? I never did anything to them."

"They have an inferiority complex, they are inferior so they have to treat people they think are less than them badly to feel superior," explained Astoria calmly and the first year girl nodded, even if it was highly unlikely she understood much of what the fifth year prefect had told her. "I would run along right now, it's unwise to stay here, but I doubt they would try something this soon after being punished."

The girl nodded, as Astoria watched her leave carefully. It was hard to explain to these Muggleborns why some of the pureblood bigots hated them. In fact, most cases they were just hated, because that's what was conditioned in the purebloods. Astoria considered herself and Daphne lucky; their parents had taught them to keep an open mind and make their own judgments. It was difficult to say what their parents' true opinions on Muggles and Muggleborns were. On second thought, it really did not matter. While not all Muggles were good, not all of them were worthless either.

"Speaking of an inferiority complex," muttered Astoria as she saw Draco lecture a little first year, who was on the verge of hysterics. She walked over, to look over at Draco. "And what was that all about?"

"The little brat had a Fanged Frisbee, they are forbidden in the halls of this school," responded Draco calmly, as he looked Astoria in the eye, as if he had no regrets in how he handled this matter.

"What about those two seventh years torturing the first year and taunting her by levitating her bag in the air?" asked Astoria.

"What about it?" responded Draco and Astoria just looked at him in irritation, bordering disgust.

"You should have tried to put a stop to this, instead of worrying about someone having a Fanged Frisbee," responded Astoria. "I think that was the graver of the two incidents."

"You took care of it," said Draco in an unconcerned tone of voice, as he failed to see Greengrass's point. "Besides, they do need to be put in their place, they think they can get away with everything."

Astoria just looked at Draco, not knowing whether he was referring to the boy was the Fanged Frisbee or the girl that was being tortured. On second thought, she did not want to know the answer to this question.

"Yes I took care of it, but you were in the area first, so you should have dealt with it," said Astoria as she looked at Draco, who appeared to be unbothered by the fact that she was upset.

"What's the point? What would it accomplish?" asked Draco in a tired voice. That blood traitor was really starting to get on his nerves.

"Perhaps actually earning something for once in your life," said Astoria. "Perhaps if you lived up to that prefect badge once in a while..."

"I do my duty, rather than trying to protect Mudbloods from being pushed down to their proper place," said Draco. "Tell Potter for all I care. He'll get his way no matter what; he wants to see me gone. That's why he killed my father; I'm beginning to think he put my mother up to taking all of my gold just to spite me. He blew me off my first year for a Weasley, he has no respect to proper purebloods, what has he done? The only reason that he's anything is because of a stupid scar on his forehead and because Dumbledore has guided him through everything in his life every step of the way."

"Harry has bothered to live up to his fame, instead of coasting on it," said Astoria as she looked at Draco, unable to believe he could say such things. "Unlike some people, he does not coast on his father's reputation either and even during death, you're still manipulated by what your father thinks instead of forming your own opinion. You aren't even a fraction of the wizard that Harry is on his worst day."

"I don't see why you're concerned, Greengrass," said Draco, sickened that a pureblood and a Slytherin to boot, had thought that Potter was more worthy than he was. "I don't why you care, you will never be good enough for me anyway."

Astoria stopped, as the words that Draco had said rang out in her ears.

“Oh I get it, you’re Draco Malfoy and no one could be good enough for you,” said Astoria, she tried to help Draco, she thought he could change, if he had been separated from the corruptive influences he had allowed himself to fall into. “At one time, I thought you could be decent, now I’m wondering why. I hope for your sake that you wise up quickly and grow up.”

Draco did not respond, but rather he turned, walking, his hands were shaking. How dare this blood traitor talk to him in such a manner! Nothing that she said was of any value of him. She was blinded by Potter.

Draco refused to believe he had been wrong. It was Potter and his friends that were the people who were wrong and the Dark Lord would make sure they all paid for it in the end.

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At dinner that night, Harry and Ginny sat at the Gryffindor table, with Neville close by. Luna, Susan, and Daphne were all eating at their respective tables but they were waiting for the moment to come. The moment they had planned for over the past several months.

It was time as McGonagall crossed the Great Hall, as the meal was winding down. The Headmistress approached the table, before she turned to address Harry.

“Harry, Albus Dumbledore is here to see you, he is waiting in my office,” muttered McGonagall in a low voice. “I trust you are finished eating..”

“Just finished,” said Harry shortly and McGonagall responded by nodding, before she walked off. Harry watched her leave, before she turned to Ginny. “It’s time.”

“Room of Requirement in ten minutes,” muttered Ginny and Harry nodded, before he kissed her good bye, and followed McGonagall

towards her office where Dumbledore was waiting to be lead to his final fate.

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"Well Harry, I did promise you that I would take you if I found one," asked Dumbledore in a calm but tired voice. Getting everything prepared for his death at the hands of Severus had been taxing, he had just barely managed to get all of his affairs in order in time.

"The Horcrux, you found one?" questioned Harry in mock surprise that Dumbledore obviously read as genuine.

"I believe I have Harry, on a cave outside the Orphanage that Tom had attended when he was young," said Dumbledore with a smile. "I believe it would be something that was easily hidden, I doubt it would be the snake, but any of the other Horcruxes could be up in that cave."

Harry nodded. Dumbledore was good at playing ignorant at what he knew, but Harry might be just a little bit better.

"I think your Invisibility Cloak will be a valuable tool, in case there is any danger," responded Dumbledore and Harry would have to agree with this point. "I shall allow you to get that and meet you here in five minutes."

"I will, Albus," said Harry, who always had his Cloak on him but it would give him time to get to the Room of Requirement to talk to the D.A. leaders about his plans of defending Hogwarts once the Death Eaters were lead in by Snape. Dumbledore had his own plans, but that would do nothing but to endanger the students and staff. Harry would not let that happen, it would be an excellent test for the D.A. even if it was against only a dozen or so Death Eaters, so the numbers were in their advantage. Of course, Voldemort would have exploited such of an advantage so why should Harry and the D.A. be any different.

Those thoughts went through his mind as he walked off, to pretend he was getting his cloak, as he headed straight for the seventh floor.

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Snape entered the office, having hidden behind a tapestry, waiting for Potter to leave.

“So this is the end?” asked Snape calmly, hardly believing it had come down to this.

“It must be done Severus, once I return, I will immobilize Harry so he doesn’t try and defend me against your attack,” said Dumbledore as he looked Severus in the eye. “In my surprise, I will drop the Elder Wand and you will strike me down with the Killing Curse. It will ensure that the path of bloodshed that has been caused with this wand ends with my demise Now head to the Hog’s Head and when you see us leave, five minutes after, lead the Death Eaters into Hogwarts. Alastor and the others will have arrived approximately ninety seconds before that.”

“I know, I’ll be in position,” said Snape in a resigned voice. He knew this plan by heart, Dumbledore had planned it so meticulously over a period of almost a year.

“Good, I would suggest you head out right now, Harry will be returning momentarily, he is just returning with his cloak,” said Dumbledore and Snape nodded, before he turned, leaving the office. Dumbledore sat awaiting Harry’s return; everything was going according to plan. Exactly going to plan and there was no reason anything at all could go wrong. By the end of the night, Harry’s final steps towards his destiny would be set into motion and he would have a successor to make sure the Wizarding World had someone like him keeping it on the straight and narrow for the next century at least and perhaps beyond.

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In the Room of Requirement, Harry stood, with the Marauder’s Map in his hand, as Ginny, Neville, Luna, Daphne, and Susan all sat, ready for some last minute instructions.

"I will be leaving with Dumbledore shortly and Snape is to lead Death Eaters into the school," explained Harry. "There should be at least a dozen, but I expect that some fools who sympathize with Voldemort in this school will join in once they get wind of what's going on. Get a message to the members of the D.A. to protect their respective house members and to keep an eye out for any suspicious activities.

"Right Harry," said Susan.

"Don't worry, even if the Slytherins in the D.A. might have to fight about half of the house," said Daphne in a calm voice.

"Just don't hope it will not come down to that," said Luna.

"I can hope, but what actually happens is a whole other matter entirely," said Daphne, who knew there would be a bunch of idiots trying to play Death Eater, with a few genuine threats thrown in for flavor.

"Snape is in Dumbledore's office, it won't be long before the old man is expecting me back," said Harry as he looked at the Marauder's Map, seeing Snape and Dumbledore, obviously going over the plan that was destined to fail.

"Good luck Harry," said Ginny as she hugged Harry, before she kissed him which Harry returned.

"It will take more than luck to get that Elder Wand, but the gesture is appreciated nevertheless," responded Harry, as he slowly backed away from Ginny, looking into her eyes, an encouraging look etched in them. Harry was ready, but first he had one more contact he needed to make, before he met up with Dumbledore. "Sirius are you there?"

"Yes, Harry, I am," said Sirius over the communication link between the Portkeys.

"Is the package ready?" asked Harry.

“Yes, she is,” said Sirius. “Sedated and ready to go, just long enough for you to put your plans in practice..”

“Excellent, put her in the proper attire and get her to Hogwarts within the next ten minutes, do not be seen yourself until it’s time,” said Harry. “And tell Nymphadora to have the other package ready, I will swing by Grimmauld Place to pick that one up when I’m done with Dumbledore.”

“Right Harry, will do,” responded Sirius, as Harry nodded, before a door appeared, that would allow him to appear immediately behind a tapestry that would allow him to slip back to Dumbledore’s office undetected.

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Lily watched the events unfold through Harry’s eyes. His careful plan would pay off in a matter of moments. She could hardly wait for the moment when Dumbledore had learned he was being out manipulated. It would be worth the wait.

Soon Harry would have the Elder Wand, which may just be the thing to allow her to return completely to life. Lily was not certain, but it was a possibility, one that she would be foolish not to at least try. It would either bring her back or leave her in the same state, in other words, there would be nothing to lose.

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“Keep that cloak on tightly Harry,” said Dumbledore as he looked over his shoulder. Harry walked behind Dumbledore, envisioning what would happen in a matter of moments. Dumbledore was walking rather slowly. Obviously he had to, to give the signal to Snape to implement that plan. Harry discretely passed a message to Ginny in code through his Portkey communicator, telling her to get ready. “I believe this is far enough, remove your Cloak slightly and hang on. I will take us to the location where I believe the Horcrux is.”

Harry did, even though he had known to Apparate for over a year. Dumbledore disappeared, with Harry behind him. They landed at the

shore of a large murky body of water. Winds kicked up, as Harry shivered and for good reason. He knew what laid beneath that water, one wrong step and it would be the end. A hundred Inferi below the depths and Dumbledore looked out curiously.

“Gravity disrupting spells, as I had feared, there would be no way to fly across even if we wanted to,” muttered Dumbledore to himself. “Only the most skilled flyer to manage to survive the flight.”

It took every bit of self control Harry had to not reveal that he had in fact made it across, when he had replaced the potion inside with another one, that would act in combination with the venom already in Dumbledore’s system when he had foolishly tried on the Resurrection Stone. Dumbledore stood calmly, as his eyes looked at an old boat on the side.

“I believe this is our transportation across,” said Dumbledore calmly and Harry looked at the boat.

“That boat doesn’t look very stable, can it even hold two of us?” asked Harry.

“Lord Voldemort is not worried about mass, but magical power and experience, only one adult wizard could be transported by this boat, no matter how powerful you may be Harry, I believe it can still hold the both of us,” said Dumbledore and Harry nodded curtly, before they climbed into the boat, that rocked slightly but overall remained stable as it moved across the water, mostly on its own accord towards the caves on the other side of the water.

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Several Death Eaters exited the passageway, as Snape watched them, before he looked from side to side, to see if the coast was clear. Dinner had concluded by now and everyone had returned to their Common Rooms for the evening. Snape nodded, as he motioned them out. The Carrows and Yaxley lead the group as the senior Death Eaters.

“Everything is clear, get in position, Dumbledore will return in perhaps the next half of an hour, to forty five minutes,” muttered Snape as the Death Eaters walked forward into the hallway. “I will take a different route there, it would be best if we were not seen walking the same route. I will send a message if anyone that is a threat comes by.”

“You better not be trying to trick us, Snape,” said Yaxley in a challenging voice but Snape just looked Yaxley calmly in the eyes.

“The Dark Lord has placed me in charge of this mission, I would think you would offer me a bit more respect,” remarked Snape calmly and Yaxley refused to respond, before he turned, leading the Death Eaters off. Snape turned; he would be in the staff room, until the disturbance that was likely to happen when a fight was instigated between both sides. The confusion would allow him to sneak up to the office, to hopefully fulfill his responsibility without a hitch.

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Ginny watched, with several members of the D.A. from a discrete location. The Death Eaters were lead in the school very close to the Gryffindor Common Room. Moody had already arrived; with a group of people who will still ignorant enough to follow Dumbledore have what had happened.

The other three teams were in position, to clean up the mess that both sides would cause and protect the students.

“Daphne, what’s the story by the Slytherin Common Room?” asked Ginny into the communicators.

“Bad news, Draco looks to be trying to sneak out, I’m keeping an eye on him, but there are several people in the house that are unaccounted for,” reported Daphne. “I’m afraid they might be on their way to help the Death Eaters.”

“Everyone is present and accounted for in Gryffindor, except for Hermione,” said Ginny.

“Knowing her, she’s in the library,” responded Daphne.

"Maybe," offered Ginny, as she proceeded to check in with Luna and Susan. If her guess was right, there would be students unaccounted for in both of those houses as well, to join in on the fight with the Death Eaters. Rumors did tend to travel fast in Hogwarts, even those that were meant to be kept silent at all costs.

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Harry followed Dumbledore to the top of the cave, where the basin awaited him, just as Harry had left it when he had switched the potion all of those months ago. He watched Dumbledore look at the basin thoughtful, milking the anticipation.

"I'm afraid there is only one method to remove this locket from the basin," offered Dumbledore after a moment's pause. "I must drink the potion inside."

"Surely you could just dump it out?" asked Harry.

"Sadly not, Tom had made certain of that, along with precautions of simply vanishing it or transfiguring it," said Dumbledore as he looked at Harry. "It must be drunk and I shall be the one to do it. I know you wish to play a part in this but you need to remain living. You have a role to play, greater than anything I could ever do. No matter what, I need you to make me drink every drop, so you can take the locket. It may be my dying action, but it has to be done. Should I survive, it will be down to you to get at least the locket out safely but if you can, return both of us to Hogwarts."

"I promise, Albus," said Harry, as he watched Dumbledore, once again careful not to be too excited or anxious. Dumbledore held a goblet as he reached forward.

"This may be no health drink, but bottoms up," said Dumbledore calmly as he filled the goblet to the top. It bubbled sickly but if Dumbledore noticed something off, he did not say anything. Dumbledore lifted the goblet to his lips, before he drank it. Immediately he felt extremely light headed and dizzy, as he staggered. "No, I must, more..."

Dumbledore took another goblet full and downed that immediately. He staggered once again, his heart was beating fast, sweat rolled down his eyes, as his hands were shaking.

“Albus, you have to drink it,” encouraged Harry, turning away so Dumbledore could not see the smile and Dumbledore nodded, knees shaking.

“I must, only a few more, before...yes I must,” rasped Dumbledore as he took another goblet full yet. Each goblet getting closer from completing removing the poison in his body from stasis, but the potion inside the basin did its trick as well. Dumbledore’s arms twitched, as Harry took the goblet.

“Allow me,” said Harry, as Dumbledore was collapsed over the half empty basin.

“No, can’t, make it stop, make it stop,” muttered Dumbledore, as the delusions were beginning to set in, as he had remembered predicting. “MAKE IT STOP!”

“Keep drinking, and it will stop, trust me,” responded Harry, as he handed Dumbledore a goblet full of the potion. The hands shook, as he slumped against the rock, but somehow, another goblet full was consumed, one closer to Harry’s victory.

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Alastor Moody privately wondered if it was a good idea to get out of bed today. He was to lead a group of unqualified misfits, who could barely aim a wand properly and would not know “Constant Vigilance” if it bitch slapped them in the face. Moody walked, as his magical eye whizzed around. Death Eaters could be around any corner, it was just a matter of catching them in the act.

“Everyone stay sharp,” barked Moody causing several members of his group to jump, one of them knocking over a suit of armor. “Quiet too, we don’t want the Death Eaters to know we’re here.”

“Too late for that, Moody,” said Yaxley as he walked over calmly. Moody turned, eye firmly on the arrogant Death Eater. “Thought you’d be retired by now, after how much we took from you. Your eye, half of your face, your leg, most of your dignity, and a few other things, yet you still fight us.”

“I won’t stop fighting until the end,” said Moody roughly, as he held his hands out, it was too soon to mount an attack.

“You know, that end could be sooner than you think if you don’t step aside,” responded Yaxley and suddenly one of the Order members had panicked, sending a stunning spell. Before Moody could regain his footing, several spells from both sides were being thrown in every direction. It was painfully obvious how much the Order was overmatched against the Death Eaters.

“AVADA KEDAVRA!” shouted one of the Death Eaters and a Killing Curse struck down one of the members of the Order. He collapsed to the ground and more fell. Moody desperately fought, but he was outnumbered.

“Keep fighting, no matter what!” shouted Moody as the Death Eaters continued to hammer.

“Alecto, Amycus, Phillips, Wilson, and Pritchard, with me, the rest of you take care of Moody,” ordered Yaxley, as he moved down the hall. Moody attempted to follow, throwing every spell he could think of, but he was blasted right in the back of his wooden leg. The leg blew into pieces, sending splinters in every which direction as the Death Eaters turned, wands raised. Moody’s wand slid out of his grip, the ultimate insult for a wizard.

Several spells flew out of every direction. One of the Death Eaters was dropped down to the ground, wrapped up tightly in ropes that were crushing him, while the others looked around. They held their wands, having no idea where the spells were coming from, but knew that someone else had joined the battle. In fact, the sounds of battle nearby indicated that the other side was not the only people who had what may have been students join in the battle.

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"You have to drink it Albus, only one more after this, then it's over, it will be the end," remarked Harry and Dumbledore took the goblet, his hands covered in sweat, his eyes blood shot, but he dumped the remaining potion down his throat. Taking it felt like a release, like a tremendous weight had been lifted off of his shoulders.

Suddenly Dumbledore's mouth felt unbearably dry and he turned to Harry, a pleading look in his eyes.

"Water," rasped Dumbledore painfully, as he held the Elder Wand in his hand, as he struggled to get to his feet. "I need water."

Harry walked towards the goblet, with his wand raised. Dumbledore watched, the seconds ticked by, as Harry prepared to fill the goblet. For some reason, he felt too weak to tell Harry that would not work.

Suddenly, Harry quickly swerved, before he pointed his wand at Dumbledore.

"EXPELLIARMUS!" shouted Harry and the Elder Wand lifted from Dumbledore's hand, before Harry caught it. He looked at the Elder Wand, with a smile on his face, his eyes widened in glee, before he pocketed it. Dumbledore was shocked, not quite understanding what had just transpired, before Harry walked over to the empty basin and lifted the locket. He walked over calmly towards the side of the cliff and dropped the locket. It landed in the water below with a splash, as several slimy hands reached forward, to pull it into the depths. "That's not the only fake that will be going into that lake today."

"Harry?" asked Dumbledore in confusion. "You...you..."

"Stabbed you in the back," responded Harry with a smirk on the face. "Why yes I did, thank you very much, I planned it, you meddling old weakling. I played the dutiful little Gryffindor golden boy, Dumbledore's man no matter what, but I had been plotting your...downfall shall we say, for quite some time. Ever since I found out you had something that Ginny and I wanted."

Dumbledore looked up at Harry, shock and he felt a little hurt at what Harry did.

“For fourteen years I had to live with the consequences of your meddling in my life, I stuck my neck out, constantly, but it all changed my name came out of the Goblet of Fire. When I was forced to compete in that Tournament, you could have done something if you really wanted to,” accused Harry. “You didn’t, but it did have one positive side effect. Ginny, with Ron and Hermione deciding to turn traitor on me, she did the right thing and I got to know her. I don’t regret that, I never will. We are united in both our love for each other and our hatred for you.”

“Miss Weasley would have never allowed you to...” said Dumbledore weakly but Harry responded by laughing.

“She hated you, for what you did to her and by extension to me, the Chamber of Secrets, you remember that, how you put her life in peril, my life in peril, to test your little golden boy, to see if he was progressing on the path you intended. You knew she had the diary from the start, didn’t you?” asked Harry and Dumbledore did not respond. “Of course you did. I saved Ginny that was the one thing that I have no regrets about. We will change this world and eliminate anyone who does not have a positive influence, by any means necessary.”

Dumbledore looked at Harry. He was slowly dying, as his entire world, his carefully orchestrated plan, had crashed down around him. He had no contingency plan if Harry had decided to go down a different path, once Ginny had become Harry’s girlfriend; he had no need for one. Now, it appeared that not only did she not prevent him from going down that path, but she followed him hand and hand down that path.

“The look on your face is amusing Dumbledore,” responded Harry. “Nearly as amusing as the look on Petunia’s face the night when she realized who killed her family.”

Dumbledore put everything together and it just seemed like this was getting worse.

“Only on five occasions Dumbledore, I was one of the eight people to play the role at various points throughout the last year, but yes I was the mastermind behind it all,” said Harry, answering Dumbledore’s unanswered question.

“What have I done?” asked Dumbledore in horror.

“We don’t have enough time to discuss everything before you expire,” said Harry as he looked at Dumbledore’s eyes, as life began to fade from him. He felt his organs inflaming slowly, the poison was doing its work. “Just think Dumbledore, without you none of this would have been possible. Now the Wizarding World will be a much better place, as those corrosive influences will be purged.”

“What gives you the right to decide that?” voiced Dumbledore weakly, feeling as if his heart had been ripped out and stomped to nothingness.

“What gave you the right to decide to put me with the Dursleys?” challenged Harry. “What gave the right to interfere in my life? What gives you the right to think that I would even continue your corrupt legacy? What gave you the right to mislead my parents?”

Dumbledore refused to respond, his body was cold and weakened, he could barely blink right now.

“You did want water, Albus and I will give it to you, in abundance,” said Harry as he rolled Dumbledore’s body over closer to the side of the cliff. “You should be thankful I’m speeding up your demise, after what Mum told me what you did, I should be thinking of ways to prolonging the agony.”

Dumbledore looked shocked; he had to have misheard Harry. There could have been no way he was talking to Lily. That should have been taken care of when Harry was sent to the Dursleys, she should have been released to the afterlife. That was the main reason that he had placed Harry there, along with being protected from the vengeance of Voldemort’s followers. Even more questions remained, from what Harry had said.

“You have it too,” said Dumbledore, as with what could prove to be his last few dying thoughts, he figured where the Resurrection Stone was.

“Ginny and I have all three of them now and I destroyed all of Riddle’s little trinkets as well long before you thought it was necessary to clue me in about what I should have known six years ago,” answered Harry. “Now Albus, it is time for you to get sent right to the next Great Adventure you have been talking about. It is really necessary for me to do this, but don’t worry, as far as Severus knows, your plan will still go off without a hitch.”

“Why?” asked Dumbledore as he was nearly over the edge, with several of his long white hairs clutched in Harry’s hand.

“For the Greater Good,” responded Harry as Dumbledore rolled over the side of the cliff. He splashed into the murky water below, where several rotting hands pulled him to the depths below and Albus Dumbledore disappeared forever.

Harry stepped back as he prepared to implement phase two of his plan for tonight.

And that’s the end of the first part of our blockbuster two chapter climax for the sixth year. See you again soon for Chapter Forty One.

Chapter Forty One: Unmasked:

The sounds of battle raged from downstairs as Severus Snape sat right outside Dumbledore's office. A dark mark had been sent up into the sky, to give Dumbledore the excuse to hurry up to Hogwarts with Potter, to meet his demise.

Snape looked out the window, any moment now, they would return, as several students had joined in on both sides of the battle, on both sides. The Order had proved themselves to be absolutely useless, unable to formulate a proper attack at the Death Eaters. Snape thought if they had to rely on students to defend Hogwarts, then the school was doomed.

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Ginny dodged a jet of yellow light from the particularly dangerous and partially psychotic Death Eater she was facing. She blocked another spell and sent a concussion curse back at him. The Death Eater blocked the spell, before he fired back. Ginny avoided that attack as well.

"Foolish little girl, you can't keep this up forever," taunted the Death Eater. "I will mangle your pretty little face and Potter won't have anything to do with a little blood traitor like you anymore. Not that he will be around much longer to care."

Ginny yawned; there were times where she could recite these speeches by heart. She blocked two more violent attacks, before she sent one of her own back at the Death Eater. The Death Eater was caught off guard, his arm broken and his wand sent to the outside. Then a simple, if a bit powerful, banishing spell struck the Death Eater right in the chest. Ginny watched as her opponent spiraled right into the wall and cracked headfirst into the wall where blood splattered out of the back of his head. It was a simple spell, not dark. It was not Ginny's fault there was a stone wall in the way of the Death Eater and he was dim enough not to put up a cushioning spell.

Ginny watched over with a sigh as a pair of the Death Eaters, along with a respectable number of students who had joined the fight had

battled with a group of D.A. members lead by Luna and Neville. The D.A. members were doing well in holding their own but Ginny decided to jump in to lend an extra wand, just in case things got a little rough. A vicious bone shattering curse had disabled the wand arm of a seventh year Ravenclaw who had just thrown an organ shredding curse at Luna, who to her credit had avoided it very carefully. Neville managed to entangle a large Slytherin, allowing two members of the D.A. to put him down with a duel stunning spell.

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Snape watched from the window and sure enough he saw Dumbledore and Potter arrive, on broomsticks from Hogsmeade. Dumbledore looked a bit off, but Snape immediately put that off to the potion that Dumbledore had to consume. It would be slow death but Snape stepped in the shadows, waiting for Dumbledore to step into the office.

“Severus, Dumbledore is outside the window,” remarked Yaxley as he arrived with the Carrows and Snape winced. Those bumlbers were going to ruin everything.

“I am aware of that, Yaxley,” responded Snape.

“Excellent, we put a barrier around the stairs leading to this office, not that the Order would be of any help, Moody was the only one who put up much of a fight and he’s been incapacitated,” remarked Yaxley. “Don’t want you to fail, Severus, just in case Dumbledore has a trick or two up of his sleeve. The old bastard is nothing else but crafty.”

“Indeed, just stay out of the way on the off chance that I need you,” remarked Snape dryly, as Yaxley and the Carrows nodded, but they looked displeased that they had to follow orders from Snape. To them, he was nothing but a coward who hid behind his position at Hogwarts and avoided doing real work because of it.

Dumbledore staggered inside and Snape turned to him, it was show time. Snape stepped forward, as Dumbledore dropped his wand in surprise, as they intended before Snape faced off against

Dumbledore. He really looked in bad shape, slumped against the wall; this would be a mercy killing.

“Oh Severus, it’s you,” rasped Dumbledore weakly as he looked at Snape. “I need your help.

“I’ll help you alright, Dumbledore,” answered Snape dryly, as he held his wand and Dumbledore’s eyes widened in horror, as Yaxley and the Carrows watched from the shadows.

“Severus, please,” begged Dumbledore but Snape raised his wand, to point at him. This was going off convincingly and without a hitch.

“Avada Kedavra” said Snape calmly and a green light escaped his wand. There was no blocking it, even if Dumbledore wanted to. Dumbledore was lifted off the ground and his body hit the ground, dead.

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The show was watched underneath the Invisibility Cloak by one Harry Potter. After the real Albus Dumbledore had been sent on his way, Harry returned to get a secret weapon that would ensure Snape had been tricked. It was a Muggle Actor, who had been struck with a rare terminal cancer that was slowly killing him. Such a coincidence was fortunate and borderline absurd, but Harry was not complaining. The actor knew what awaited him, a slow and painful death. Harry tracked him down, after overhearing a couple of Muggleborns talk about his plight. The Actor jumped at the chance to not only end his life quickly before the suffering truly kicked in but to have the ultimate death scene. Harry thought his performance was admirable, nearly on par with his own. Polyjuice potion was used to allow him to take on the appearance of Dumbledore. Technically, it was not supposed to be used on Muggles, as it was proven to be toxic but when one had cancer it was of little concern.

So far, so good. As Harry pulled the hood over his head, he thought the Death Eaters had a nasty shock in store for them right about now.

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Yaxley and the Carrows stepped forward, looking over the fallen form of Dumbledore, as Snape kicked the wand under the desk and out of sight. It would be a disaster if one of the Carrows or Yaxley found that wand.

"I don't believe it, Snape, you actually did it," said Yaxley.

"You killed Dumbledore," remarked Alecto Carrow. "The Dark Lord had never been able to do so for years, but you did it."

"Bah, Dumbledore was weakened from old age and he looked pretty out of it, Snape got a lucky shot," said Amycus Carrow in a disbelieving voice.

"Luck often has a bit to do with success," remarked Snape softly, as he looked at Amycus.

"Luck won't save you from your downfall," said a voice and the Death Eaters looked around, slightly fearful.

"I hear him, but I don't see him," muttered Alecto as her eyes darted from side to side, but suddenly an Incendio Bomb flew from out of nowhere. Snape quickly put up a shield as the Death Eaters scattered. The bomb exploded, lighting the walls of the Headmaster's office on fire. Several of the past Headmasters and Headmistresses screamed, as they darted towards other paintings.

Snape turned and he managed to just barely block a flesh tearing curse. His counter was only enough to avoid his skin from being torn, he was still knocked off balance from the sheer power of the curse. The Carrows and Yaxley looked up, before more Incendio Bombs dropped to the ground. They blinked before they went off.

"Outside the office quickly!" shouted Yaxley when he finally found his voice, as the office was on fire and a cold round of laughter echoed through the office.

"Allow me to help you leave," remarked Downfall and Yaxley was thrown right through the office door with a high impact blast. His head

broke the door and also the gargoyle outside the office was sent to the ground. Yaxley hit hard, blood splattering in every direction as he hit. The Carrows retreated, but Snape turned, outside the office, as razor wire shot from the sleeve of Downfall. Quickly, he managed to send a rust curse and the wire dropped to the ground.

“Inventive, Snape,” said Downfall as Snape was face to face with the hooded face that many Death Eaters feared. He just stood, wand at the ready as Downfall advanced forward, as if stalking his prey “But it won’t be enough to save your worthless skin in the end.”

“Drop the mask Potter, I know it’s you,” said Snape softly as he just barely dodged a vicious attack that would have sliced his throat. “You are nothing but an arrogant little boy, who is about to be put in his place. I shall do that favor for you.”

Downfall threw another Incendio Bomb and the backlash caught Snape in the hand. Snape winced, his hand burned as he dropped to the ground. The gargoyle was levitated from the ground and thrown down towards Snape. Snape managed to just barely blast the gargoyle to the side, sending bits of stone flying in each direction.

A large steel spike rose into the air and smashed against Snape’s chest. It came inches away from impaling it, as Downfall controlled it. Snape dropped to the ground, gasping for air. Another attack and Snape was sent spiraling to the ground, landing right on his elbow. It shattered, bent at an awkward angle.

“So, Severus, where is your sharp tongue now?” taunted Downfall as Snape turned, his elbow contorted in a direction it was not meant to go in. He was hoisted off the ground and thrown right down again. Snape turned, his ribs were sore, blood dripped down from his ear where it was cut when he connected, and his elbow was twisted, but still, he refused to let Downfall get the better of him.

“SECTUMSEPPRA!” shouted Snape as he sent his creation at Downfall but while the spell was successful, Downfall stood there, not affected, not even one drop of blood, as Snape wondered how this could be possible.

"I'm sorry, was that supposed to slice me into ribbons?" asked Downfall calmly before the wand was lifted and Snape was knocked backwards again. He could feel his ribs shattered and it was not a pretty sight, as he laid on the ground, in agony "Here is a little demonstration on how it should be done, Snape."

A loud bang echoed through the hall and Snape could not have blocked it in time. Two razor sharp discs had been magically conjured and spiraled through the air. One missed Snape's ear but the other had sliced right through the wrist of his wand hand severing it. Snape collapsed, as he looked at his own severed hand, his wand still clutched in it, as blood splattered to the ground.

Downfall turned, as much as finishing Snape off would be great, that was not the plan, at least not today. Soon enough, but it was time to test a little newly created potion on Snape that not even he could detect. It might kill him, but that would be no big loss. However, if it worked, then it would be a great help to his future plans, as the dart impacted in Snape's left arm, before it dissolved, releasing the potion into his blood stream.

Suddenly a pair of seventh year Slytherins rushed down the hallway and seemed rather surprised to see Downfall, but they exchanged grins.

"Look here, our little vigilante has come out to play," remarked one of the Slytherins with a smirk.

"Just think if we capture him, the Dark Lord would reward us," offered another Slytherin, as they aimed their wands at Downfall.

"Someone is really sick of living," remarked Downfall, as Snape managed to make a strategic retreat, wrapping his hand his robes, to try to stop the bleeding. A cutting curse was thrown at Downfall, but it was evaded. A organ ripping curse, but Downfall once again avoided that. "I'm warning you, one more curse and you will pay."

"AVADA KEDAVRA!" shouted one of the Slytherins but it was obvious that this was the first time that he had tried this particular dark curse, as he collapsed. Downfall blasted a coil from his glove and it wrapped

around the Slytherin, cutting into him. His friend appeared to be a little less brave right now and he turned to run.

Downfall whipped his wand towards the Slytherin, before both of his legs shattered. The would be Death Eater fell to the ground and Downfall hoisted him up by the robes, before throwing him right into a suit of armor. The young man's eyes widened as he was impaled crudely on the axe of the suit of armor. He was limp, blood dripping to the ground, as he hung from the suit of armor.

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Daphne avoided an organ shredding curse, as a group of first years stood paralyzed. She watched as her sister and several other D.A. members fought in the distance. Harry had told them not to use lethal force, unless of course they could make it look like an accident. A piece of the ceiling that had been weakened by several curses ricocheting off of it had given Daphne an end. She deflected the attack back, before she aimed her wand towards the ceiling.

"REDUCTO!" shouted Daphne, and the already weakened ceiling began to crack, before it collapsed right on top of her opponent. His wand was knocked out of his hand by the pieces of debris coming down onto his head. "Astoria that Death Eater slipped down the hallway!"

"You take half to get that lot back to the dormitories safely, I'll take half to deal with him and any others lurking nearby," said Astoria firmly, as Daphne nodded, before the group split up, going in their separate directions to do what they said. Hopefully, all of the Death Eaters could be dealt with before they cause too much damage.

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Susan lead her group of Hufflepuffs, sending a dizziness hex right at one of the Hufflepuffs who had joined in on the battle, on the other side. Harry had warned her that there might be several Hufflepuffs who might join Voldemort, but hearing it and actually experiencing it had been two different things.

One of the students dropped to the ground, disabled, arms and legs snapped together. Some of them had not been marked yet, so it was difficult to prove they were in the league with Voldemort. Susan dodged a slicing curse, before she blasted her opponent in the eyes with a Conjunctivitis Curse. This backed him off right into a stunning spell which dropped him to the ground.

“Don’t stop fighting, make sure we disable all of them,” said Susan as she turned to Hannah and Ernie who had just lead a group of stranded first and second years back inside the house. “Are there any more Death Eaters nearby.”

“I don’t think so, I think they’re elsewhere by now,” said Hannah.

“Where’s Harry in all of this?” asked Ernie curiously.

“He’s around, he should be back soon enough, if he’s not already here, but we can’t rely on him to do everything for us, he has his own things that he needs to take care of tonight,” said Susan calmly as the other two sixth years nodded, as order had been mostly restored. The group now had to figure out exactly how to split off to help the other houses, who might be having their own problems nearby.

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“Another one is down, but they just keep coming,” said Neville as he dodged an attack, a black curse that he did not really recognize but judging by the damage it caused when it connected with the wall behind him, it was a good idea. Luna and Ginny moved over and the Death Eater finally was dropped to the ground, landing hard on the back of his neck when he dropped the ground.

“That should do it, another paralyzed at least, killed at the most,” said Ginny as a mixed group of Ravenclaws and Gryffindors continued the fight. “Harry just sent me a message, he said he’s here.”

“Nice to see that, not that we aren’t doing well enough,” said Neville as he helped a group of fourth years take out another student who had joined in on the fight. They appeared to not be learning too well from the failure of their peers.

“Still all the help is appreciated, especially when it comes from Harry,” said Luna from a smile, as she dodged a deadly orange light and fired back with a grey light that caused her adversary to go light headed, before he dropped to the ground.

“He says to keep doing what you’re doing, he has to make sure the package is secured,” muttered Ginny and the other members of the D.A. nodded, there was no need to go into further detail. The fight continued to rage on throughout Hogwarts.

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Astoria moved forward, with the other members of the D.A. tied up by a group of seventh years in Ravenclaw and Slytherin, as a pair of figures walked forward. Her posture stiffened as she watched them, but relaxed as it was only Crabbe and Goyle walking forward. Their eyes widened with glee as they moved forward.

“Well if isn’t the little girl who follows Draco around,” taunted Goyle as he looked at Astoria with a smirk on his face. Obviously if she liked Draco for something other than his money, she could not have been too bright. “And people call us dumb, but we ditched the little peon when we had the chance.”

“You should have taken up with a real pureblood, now we have to hurt you, Greengrass,” said Crabbe stupidly, but the time they had spent talking had allowed Astoria enough time to maneuver around them. A pair of stunning spells and they were dropped to the ground, with ease.

Astoria turned around and saw the Death Eater she was supposed to be pursuing walked across from her. The mask was ripped and she could see his features poking from underneath the mask. A bone breaking hex was send right towards Astoria but she dodged that.

“You can’t keep this up forever, you should have stayed with all of your little friends when you had the chance,” taunted the Death Eater and Astoria dodged the attack by her difficult opponent again. Each spell came perilously close to hitting her. She fired back her attacks,

trying to keep one step ahead of her opponent, but unfortunately her position was not that much of an advantage when fighting. A bone breaking curse had caught her right in the kneecap. Astoria fell back, clutching her knee and she tried to hold fire back, but the Death Eater disarmed her. The Death Eater stepped forward, before holding his wand out.

“Crucio,” stated the Death Eater and Astoria felt pain beyond anything she had ever experienced. Harry had described his curse several times when he was lecturing the D.A. but it was nothing like Astoria had ever experienced.

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Draco Malfoy walked; he would have jumped into the fight once he saw the perfect opportunity to prove himself. Until then, he would stay mostly out of the way and pick his shots wisely. There would be a chance to prove himself to the Dark Lord, he had heard screams that Downfall was here and taking Potter out when he was in that ridiculous get up would kill two birds with one stone. The Dark Lord would reward him beyond all of his other follows and Draco could erase all the unfortunate mistakes his father had made.

Draco heard a scream nearby, but he disregarded it as nothing. Most likely some Mudblood getting tortured for getting in the way one of the Dark Lord's followers, but then again, that was a glorious thing that Draco felt he needed to take a peek out. He walked forward towards the sounds of the screams, lifting back the tapestry so he could get a better look. Draco stepped back, as he saw a Death Eater, torturing a figure, with dark hair. It took Draco a few moments to realize that it was Astoria Greengrass.

Draco watched her limbs twitch and her screams. While he held no sympathy towards her, due to her having a contradictory view of the proper values of the Wizarding World and confronting him several times, not to mention confronting him and calling him out on some of his actions. Attractive, yes, but her attitude was not proper, it was obvious to Draco that the Greengrass parents did an improper job of raising their daughters.

Yet as Draco watched her, he felt a slightly sickening feeling in the pit of his stomach that he could not place. He did remember his father complaining about some Death Eaters taking too much pride in their work and thus giving their enemies a chance to escape by drawing out their torment too long. A quick death was most effective and Draco did agree on this point, as he watched Astoria be tortured, her screams echoing through his ears. Draco stepped forward, to perhaps convince the Death Eater to give her a quick death, it was only the right thing to do, but he stopped. Did he really want to intervene and get killed himself as some twisted vengeance for his father's mistakes? He watched as Astoria looked at him, she had spotted him, despite all of the pain, she was almost pleading for him to help her, to do what she thought was the right thing.

Draco looked, fingertips on his wand, before he hesitated. She got herself into this mess by being with Potter and Weasley, she could handle this herself. A drawn out torture might not be what she deserved, but damned it Draco was going stick his neck out for someone who would likely die because of her association with Potter anyone.

Draco walked back through the tapestry and never looked back, as Astoria continued to be tortured.

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Through the haze of pain, Astoria had seen Draco, he had saw him look at her, in a way that she had dreamed for years. For a brief second, she thought that she was right about Draco, despite proof to the contrary. However, that second was brief and Draco showed his true colors, walking off when he could have helped her. That one action had caused Astoria to mentally disregard any lingering hope she was desperately clutching onto, like some tattered security blanket that should have been thrown in the rubbish bin years ago.

"I must admit, you're tough, little girl, but I will break your mind and maybe I'll send you some associates of mine," said the Death Eater in a leering voice as he looked at Astoria. "They could use a little toy, but you see, I don't swing that way and besides I prefer mine a little younger."

Astoria looked up, but the sight she saw brought a slight smile to her face. It was not Draco, it was actually someone who would not turn tail and run like an arrogant coward instead of doing the right thing.

"What are you smiling about?" demanded the Death Eater, as he looked at Astoria. "I guess your mind is breaking faster than I could have ever believed."

"Look behind you," rasped Astoria weakly, but the Death Eater responded with a cold round of laughter. He was not about to be taken off guard by such an obvious trick. He prepared to finish off Astoria but a magically conjured metal spike connected with his back, shattering his spinal cord. The Death Eater fell to the ground and another spell had knocked a suddenly hardened tapestry over onto him, squashing him like an insect.

"Astoria, speak to me," muttered Harry, as he reached forward, after having sent a message to Ginny that he needed help. "Are you alright?"

"Fine, thanks to you and no thanks to him," said Astoria weakly, as she took Harry's hand and allowed him to gingerly pull her to a standing position. Her face was pale and her hair was all in disarray. "You were right...I wanted to die when they put that curse on me...it hurt like hell. How could I have been so stupid to lose my wand?"

"Now, Astoria, it was a mistake, we all make them, at the worst possible times," remarked Harry, as Astoria leaned against Harry for support, her knees were weak. Ginny sent him a return message, saying she was on her way in the next minute or two.

"You wouldn't have," said Astoria, as she looked at Harry, just barely able to stand. Mere description could not even begin to describe how painful that blasted curse was.

"Well I am the exception to many rules, often slapping logic and what some people foolishly perceive to be realism right in the face," said Harry and Astoria cracked a weak smile, but her body ached all over.

She would say that curse hurt like hell, if it was not for the fact that she was almost certain

“Astoria!” shouted Ginny in shock, as she saw the state that the girl was in. “What happened?”

“Some Death Eater decided to have a bit of fun by torturing her, her mind came close to snapping, in fact it might have had I gotten here only a minute or two later, but she needs help,” responded Harry and Ginny nodded, as she gently took Astoria, to help her to her feet. “Get her to the hospital wing, if any Death Eaters get in your way, take care of them.”

“Right Harry,” said Ginny as Harry leaned over, to briefly kiss her.

“I’ll see you in a little bit, I have one more piece of business to take care of,” said Harry, as he stepped into the shadows, watching Ginny assist Astoria towards the Hospital Wing. Harry reached forward, before he pulled the hood back over his face. It was time. “Sirius, third corridor, fourth floor, Death Eaters are heading there, have the package ready then.”

“Right Harry, I’m on my way now,” said Sirius over the connection.

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“What happened to you Snape?” asked one of the Death Eaters, as the Carrows stood, shaking with absolute fear, with the remaining Death Eaters who were left standing, seven in total, down from the usual twelve. Several of the students who had joined in had joined them, including Draco Malfoy.

“That vigilante removed my wand hand, I managed to stabilize the wound and retrieve my wand, but I need medical attention, we need to get out of here, before he finishes the job,” said Snape. “Potter, he’ll kill us all, after what I did to Dumbledore.”

“The Dark Lord was correct then,” said Amicus Carrow and Snape nodded, before they retreated down the corridors as quickly, to get out of the school.

"The passageway is just around the corner, if we can..." stated Snape before he winced, as hovering above him on a broomstick, was Downfall. Several took steps back in fear.

"Leaving so soon, Snape, well the fun has just begun," remarked Downfall, as a wand tapped an Incendio Bomb before it was tossed to the ground. The Death Eaters scattered, with the bomb catching a student that was foolish enough to remain in the path of the device. The student screamed, as she burst into flames.

"If we all attack him at once, we should be able to put down this nuisance and bring him to the Dark Lord to be unmasked!" shouted one of the Death Eaters and they could not have acted more perfectly, sending several spells into the air, which Downfall dodged, the broomstick swerving.

"Keep firing, trap him where he can't move," said one of the Death Eaters as Snape watched, trying to discretely deflect the spells without being detected. If Potter was captured this soon, then Dumbledore's well laid plans would be lost. More spells were dodged.

"Downfall went through there!" shouted one of the seventh year students, a Hufflepuff pointing towards a tapestry that Downfall had flown right through and Snape winced, that was a dead end passageway as far as he knew, there would be no way out, Potter had inadvertently trapped himself, the arrogant child.

"I have him," said Draco triumphantly as he walked forward. Snape breathed a sigh of relief, there would be no way that Draco could even have a hope of successfully capturing Potter. He braced himself for the moment that Draco would be killed, but a spell passed through the curtain and a surprised gasp, followed by a loud thump behind the tapestry. Draco pulled it back as the Death Eaters stepped forward.

"I don't believe it, the little arrogant...he got him," said one of the Death Eaters, as they looked down, to see the knocked out and unconscious form of Downfall. Snape stepped forward, something was very off. Draco stepped forward reaching for the hood but Snape shook his head.

"No, Draco, the pleasure of unmasking Downfall will be reserved for the Dark Lord only, but I'm certain he will allow you to view the destruction of this vigilante because of your in taking Downfall down," said Snape trying to avert Draco's attention before one of the Death Eaters noticed something off about Downfall as well. "I believe you may be rewarded for this as well."

Draco nodded, even if he wanted to make Potter pay personally for slaughtering his father, gaining favor with the Dark Lord is much more important.

"Let us leave then, before one of Potter's friends attacks us for taking him out," said Snape quickly, both wanting to depart and also realizing that his temporary measure to stabilize the bleeding from his severed hand would only hold for maybe moments more. The Death Eaters, along with Draco moved, but Snape held up his intact hand at the others who had made a movement to follow them. "You are to stay here, claim that you were placed under the Imperius Curse if the Ministry investigates this matter. You are unmarked, but do retreat before anyone comes by here."

They nodded, before walking off in all directions, some feigning dazed looks, as they returned to their Common Rooms, as if nothing happened, as the Death Eaters disappeared, carrying Downfall down the corridor, into the distance.

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Several minutes later, Harry Potter appeared from the corridor, humming nonchalantly as if nothing had happened, before he moved forward to send a message to the leaders of the D.A.

"Leaders get everyone who has not been injured to the Room of Requirement and I'll meet you in about an hour," said Harry in a low voice. "I need to meet up with the teachers, to tell them about Dumbledore's...regrettable fate."

Harry wiped a fake tear from his face in mock regret at what happened to Dumbledore, before he walked off towards the staff

room, to tell McGonagall of what had occurred with Dumbledore. After all, there would have to be a funeral arranged, as Harry held the Elder Wand, looking at it with triumphant glee, before placing it in his pocket. They had all three of them, now it would be the beginning of their plans. There were also some traitors to their school to deal with, but that would come later.

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“Today, I bring forth the individual you call Downfall, whom many of you foolishly fear, but there is no fear, if a weak little insect with a wand could take down this alleged dangerous threat,” said Voldemort looking at Draco in a scathing matter. Snape had already departed to get some medical attention, with Voldemort’s blessing as he had done an admirable job in finishing Dumbledore off. “Although young Draco, I suppose I should thank you, you have proven yourself with a level above many who have fallen. For this, I thank you and you will be rewarded by allowing to live as one of my faithful servants. Do not consider this reward as unlimited license to fail, because the second you do, you will be eliminated. Is that clear Draco?”

“Yes, my Lord,” said Draco with glee as he watched the Dark Lord move forward, where Downfall was bound at his feet, and he reached forward, hands on the hood.

“And now, I shall prove once and for all that Downfall is none other than...” stated Voldemort as he reached forward and pulled the hood up. Several Death Eaters gasped as Voldemort looked in the face, in surprise. “Bella?”

Bellatrix Lestrange looked up, a dazed look on her face, as her head throbbed, barely able to focus, but the one thing she did see was the look of utter anger and revulsion on the face of her master. Even though she did not know why, she knew the Dark Lord had been displeased.

And that’s Chapter Forty One. As I mentioned last chapter, there were eight Downfalls, with Bellatrix being Downfall Number Nine, the one who took the downfall for the entire scheme, pardon the pun. Most of the identities of the eight downfalls are obvious, well actually

six are really, really obvious, and the other two have been guessed by someone already in a review. They will be revealed officially soon, but it may be in a blink and you miss it matter, for those really paying attention. Most of you will notice it when it happens. :)

As for the five times Harry was Downfall, well a couple of them are really obvious and the others, well the hints are there. You just have to read between the lines. It's highly unlikely that I'll actually say in the story.

Also the sound you heard was any chance of Draco being redeemed flushed down right down the toilet. Draco will be Draco and while he might have brief flashes of something vaguely resembling a human being, mostly, he is a petty self serving little arrogant pompous jerk who is only out for himself. Voldemort is going to amuse himself by putting Draco on what are essentially suicide missions. How long can he survive? Only I know the answer. And several people will be out for his blood as well.

Next Chapter, "Albus Dumbledore" gets laid to rest with Harry delivering the eulogy, Harry and Ginny experiment a bit with their new toy, and they prepare to bring a certain character out of limbo. All that and more, as we head into the summer and towards the second to last major story arc in this story as the Downfall arc has been mostly wrapped up in a neat little package with a bow on top, just in time for Christmas.

Chapter Forty Two: Eulogy:

"My Lord?" asked Bellatrix in a dazed voice as she looked up at the Dark Lord. She had never seen him so furious in his life and that fury was directed towards her. Bellatrix attempted to rise to her feet, but felt like her legs were laid down by cement. "What is going on?"

"Perhaps that is a question that you should answer for me, Bella," responded Voldemort coldly as he looked at Bellatrix with pure fury. "I could hardly believe it you of all people would betray me, Bellatrix Lestrange or would you prefer to be addressed by the name that you used to slaughter my followers, Downfall?"

"Downfall?" asked Bellatrix in confusion as she looked at the Dark Lord. "What kind of absurd name is that?"

"It is the one you chose as your cover to betray me, I assumed you had been captured and left in a more secure facility, even beyond Azkaban, but this betrayal is unacceptable Bella," responded Voldemort, as the Death Eaters hissed from the side, obviously trying to share the Dark Lord's anger but Voldemort turned to the Death Eaters with a glare to silence them. "I'm afraid that no matter how useful you have been to me in the past, you will not be allowed to live."

"Betrayal? I would never betray you, my Lord," said Bellatrix in a horrified voice, before something clicked in her mind, memories that she had not remembered previously had come to her. She remembered everything clearly now, at least as far as she knew. "Besides, I did it for you, my Lord."

"What?" demanded Voldemort as he looked at Bellatrix in shock, as she looked up with an expression on her traitorous, disgusting face. "What do you mean by this?"

"Exactly what I said, my Lord, I did it for you, those worms would have betrayed by the second something they thought was better came along," remarked Bellatrix with a smug expression on her face, as if she expected the Dark Lord to be pleased with her but Voldemort just responded with his usual cold glare. "I killed them one

by one, therefore you don't have to worry about their treachery. Only the followers that were truthfully loyal to you will remain, my Lord. I only regret I didn't kill Snape, he has been playing you for a fool, Dumbledore masterminded his own death, so Potter could beat you..."

"Silence, Bella," responded Voldemort coldly as he looked at Bellatrix, unable to contain his disgust. "I shall worry about the treachery on my own; it is not your right or duty to decide who is loyal to me and who is a worthless coward who deserves to die. That is my responsibility alone. For all the years of service under me, I thank you, especially for attempting to find me when no one else has. However, I'm afraid Azkaban has deluded your sense of reality and pushed you completely around the bend, so I will deal with this. Despite your deceit and betrayal I will offer you a simple death, preferable to the shame of living with the fact you betrayed the Dark Lord. I would not grant this if it had not been for your track record of success. AVADA KEDAVRA!"

A green light blasted towards Bellatrix before her mind completely cleared and her eyes widened, realizing she had been played for a dupe. She remembered what Potter had done and what he knew, but before she could warn the Dark Lord, the killing curse struck her dead.

"Someone dispose of this mess," responded Voldemort coldly as two Death Eaters walked over, to carry Bellatrix's body out. Voldemort slowly turned to the rest of the Death Eaters, with a calm, cold, indifferent expression on his face, before he gave a crisp nod. "This meeting has been dismissed."

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"WHAT DO YOU MEAN ALBUS DUMBLEDORE WAS KILLED BY SNAPE?" demanded McGonagall causing Harry to step back. McGonagall looked shocked and rather upset at this piece of news. "No...I can't...I refuse...he can't be...dead..."

"Come to your office, Professor, seeing is in fact believing," responded Harry calmly as he lead McGonagall down the corridor, who was shaking, looking rather upset. While the real Dumbledore

would have been ripped to shreds by now, the fake was in the office, peaceful, bearing the appearance of the original. The gargoyle swung open on its own accord as Harry walked in, with McGonagall taking a few reluctant steps forward, as she looked down at the body.

“Merlin’s beard!” shouted McGonagall as she looked at the body of the former Headmaster and the man who had taught her pretty much everything she knew about Transfiguration. He was dead. “You’re saying that Snape...killed him.”

“Exactly what I’m saying, Professor, sorry you have to hear it, but he’s gone by now, I was tied up with the chaos going on in the hallway, but I saw Snape and several Death Eaters carry off that awful vigilante Downfall,” responded Harry and McGonagall nodded as she looked at Dumbledore. “As far as I know, he was the only death, a few injuries, but nothing too fatal.”

“Thankfully, no students were hurt then, a couple of teachers were banged up and Alastor Moody is in bad shape, but he will survive the night,” said McGonagall in a shaky voice.

“You should inform the Ministry, Professor, and make the proper arrangements, I’ll be with my friends,” said Harry and McGonagall nodded stiffly; obviously Harry was better at hiding his emotions than she was. He was like his mother in that regard, but if he wanted to grieve in his own way, that was his business. “I’ll be in the staff room tomorrow morning, if you wish to talk to me then, pass the word to the other teachers.”

“Go,” responded McGonagall as she had a lot to do, other than contacting the Ministry and making the proper arrangements with the Dumbledore funeral, she had to figure what to do with exams. While she wanted to try and continue with business as usual, surely the school could not continue as normally in this state, with someone murdered on the grounds. Especially Dumbledore of all people and once word got out that Death Eaters entered the school, people would pull their students from Hogwarts.

She had a long night ahead of her.

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“So you finally have it?” asked Luna as Harry nodded, as the six D.A. leaders were in the Room of Requirement, as Harry held out the Elder Wand in his hand. “Just as the books said, an impressive piece of work, but I doubt few could even handle the power within.”

“I wouldn’t want it, anyway,” remarked Neville with a shudder. “Too many people after my blood, once they get wind that I have it, I’m actually surprised that more people didn’t try to kill Dumbledore, but I guess that has to do with the fact he managed to hide that he actually had the Elder Wand.”

“That has to be it,” responded Susan as she shook her head, looking at Harry and Ginny, who sat with the Elder Wand between them, along with the Cloak and the Resurrection Stone. “Still you got all three of them, but if people find out...”

“There will be a lot of psychotic lunatics after our heads,” said Ginny who could barely contain a smile she had on her face.

“Yeah, haven’t been through that before, have we Ginny?” asked Harry before he looked at Ginny, with a smile as the entire group laughed.

“Sometime tells me it would be business as usual, and even then I bet it would be very difficult to pry any of those Hallows away from their rightful owners,” said Luna with a smile. “No one had ever shared the Hallows and I think it might make all of the difference. Whomever wants them would have to beat both of you.”

“Won’t happen,” said Harry confidentially as he held hands with Ginny over the Hallows, as a symbol of their victory. “The look on Dumbledore’s face, you talk about priceless...it was almost like someone shot his puppy and kicked its decapitated head right in his lap.”

“He really had no clue,” responded Susan as she shook her head. “All these years, he seemed to know everything...”

"I think we've figured out Albus Dumbledore, the fact that he seemed to know everything, was because he controlled everything, so why would he not know?" asked Luna.

"True, that does make a good point, besides having eyes and ears in the right places, along with having access to a school like Hogwarts where rumors travel as easily as the wind," said Neville as he looked at the group seriously. "I grew up thinking that Albus Dumbledore was great, but now, I know most of his greatness was attributed to his ability to properly manipulate the surroundings around him to achieve his most desirable outcome."

"A mistake I made, until the Chamber of Secrets, Harry was put in danger because of his games and so was I," said Ginny. "May he rot for all eternity for what he did, trying to stop the Wizarding World from progressing."

"Yes, but we don't have to worry about him anymore, one more obstacle," said Harry. "Downfall is now in the hands of Voldemort."

"Which plan did you use Harry?" asked Luna curiously and the others looked curious, even Daphne, who remained quiet most of the meeting, leaned forward.

"We managed to sedate her and plant the false memories in her mind, although I doubt they would have held for more than a couple of hours, long enough for Voldemort to kill her for her betrayal," said Harry. "The other plan, I never had to use it and quite frankly, that was only to be used if Bellatrix could not be properly controlled. Now I can stop implementing those hypnotic suggestion modifications to the potions, but I must admit, they were working better at healing her than I could have hoped. She might never make a full recovery and I'll be damned if I will ever trust her."

"Yeah, as if she could ever have the ability to be Downfall," said Neville, who once again, found himself amused about Bellatrix's fate, even more so because it would have happened by now. "She would have gotten herself killed the first time out."

"True, she would have, but the fact remained, I had to make her believe that she might be Downfall, coupled in with her guilt of what she did and her inability to do anything useful against Death Eaters, it was a natural combination, but I hate to do something like that unless it's absolutely necessary," said Harry, who would have done that had she not shown any signs of recovery and had any hint of reverting back to her old ways of the fourth and fifth year. Harry caught sight Daphne, who was distracted for obvious reasons. Harry decided to ask the question that Daphne was not going to, as he turned to Ginny. "How is Astoria?"

"She'll make a recovery, she was hit pretty hard with that Cruciatus Curse and was week," said Ginny seriously. "She was a bit upset more than anything, even if she didn't really want to show it."

"I know why, she was crying when I visited her because she realized what everyone was telling her about that arrogant bastard was right when he watched her being tortured, without even bothering to lift her, despite her looking at him, trying to get him to act like a decent human being for once in his life," said Daphne angrily, she was not too happy with one Draco Malfoy and Harry and Ginny looked to be just as upset. "I mean, I told her for years he was not a decent guy. He's proved the first part of that in spades with his self serving antics of today and the second one will be in doubt when I get a hold of him."

"I think Astoria will want to get a hold of him herself when she gets over being heartbroken," said Ginny and Harry nodded, he had seen how vicious the girl could be in her dueling during the D.A. and that was against her friends. Once Astoria caught up with him, there was a good chance that Draco Malfoy could become the late Draco Malfoy.

"Thank you for saving her, by the way Harry," responded Daphne with a nod towards Harry.

"Don't mention it, if I was a moment later, I shudder to think what might have happened," said Harry and Daphne nodded, but it was something that none of them wanted to think of. "As far as the Downfall thing, well it's done, quite a few Death Eaters have been

dropped dead, along with certain undesirable faces from my past were eliminated. Whether the person under the mask was a defense leader, a serious threat, or changed the face of how Downfall was handled, all eight brought great success to the mask. Because getting Voldemort all paranoid and a few more of his followers doubting his ability to lead, I think everything worked well.”

The others nodded, Downfall had been a scheme that there had been more than a few doubts about whether or not it worked. However, Harry and Ginny were confident of its success when they presented it to the group back in September, after a few trial runs over the summer and it did work out well in the end. At least a good fifth of Voldemort’s Death Eaters were eliminated, including a few of his most fanatical and dangerous followers. Since Greyback had been killed, there had been rumors that the werewolves had even steered away from Voldemort, doubting his promises without the forceful presence of Greyback to back up Voldemort. It was not cut and dry however, the werewolves were split, many of them not wanting anything to do with Voldemort, while others still held onto the same ideals.

“Still, it did keep Death Eaters looking over their shoulder for a while,” remarked Luna calmly.

“They still might be,” offered Susan. “Even if they see Downfall is dead, some of them are going to wonder, if it was the real one...if the real Downfall is still stalking them from the shadows, waiting for the proper moment to kill them.”

“Good, that’s exactly what I want, but the Ministry will believe that the Death Eaters have brought Downfall to be killed by Voldemort, especially what I told McGonagall, that Downfall was carried off by Death Eaters, that I saw it,” responded Harry with a smirk. “With a Halloween costume that has no value, a cheap imitation of the real deal, stripped clean of anything that can be used mind you. Not that Voldemort would really look into it too much, he is more inclined to punish the traitor as a show of force to his Death Eaters.”

“His loss,” remarked Neville as the others nodded in agreement. The costume was perhaps the greatest element behind the Downfall

mystery, with the advanced charm work placed on it that blocked out the majority of spells. Illusion spells that messed with an enemy's vision, causing them to aim for a foe that they believed was in another direction and also caused them to never get too close of a look at Downfall. Repelling spells to bounce off most spells, the gloves that Harry managed to get to work when the twins failed, even if it was on a temporary basis, having to redo the spell work after a few hours. Added to a voice distorter built into the hood and it was a mystery that no one could solve. Of course, Harry had a hunch that Fred and George might have figured it out by now, but they assumed he knew that they knew and did not bring up the issue.

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"Amazing, I doubt you would have been able to find a wand that would be better crafted even in a million years," said Lily as she looked over the wand, after the others have left, with only Harry and Ginny remaining in the Room of Requirement. Ginny had wrapped herself snugly around Harry, with the other two Hallows laying at their feet. "The power it could contain, I doubt there would be anything to match it. In the hands of an average witch or wizard, it can do above average magic. In the hands of someone already great..."

"The magic could be beyond comprehension, especially when two great people wield it," said Harry.

"I for one look forward in finding out what the limits of the Elder Wand is and what could be accomplished when in tandem with the other two Hallows," remarked Ginny as she looked at the wand. "According to the history we managed to find, no one has even come close to having two of the Hallows, and now we have all three."

"Just one more step in our battle to reshape the Wizarding World, to make sure the mistakes made by Dumbledore and the horror of Voldemort is never repeated again," said Harry and Ginny nodded, as she held Harry's hand, calmly resting her head on her shoulder, legs draped over his leg. "We will succeed."

"We have to, we've come so far, failure is not an option, we have to win at all costs," said Ginny with a yawn. "We will win, there's no if about it."

"That's the right attitude to have with this," remarked Lily. "Dumbledore was only one symptom of an overall problem...but we can worry about that in the not too distant future. Right now, there is something more pressing, the fact that now you have the tool to bring me back out of this limbo."

"What?" asked Ginny in surprise but Harry looked, he had figured it out.

"The Elder Wand, you think it might be powerful enough, despite the damage Dumbledore did," said Harry and Lily nodded calmly. "I suppose that might work, what do I need to do..."

"Well first we need to get the instructions on how to unattach my soul from yours, while creating a new body in the process, a modification that will take some time to do, but naturally I've had plenty of time to think about it, keeps my mind busy when you two are...doing certain activities," said Lily with a slight smile on her face as she watched them before clearing her throat. "Don't worry about it until the school year ends in the next week, there are still some things I need to go over, calculations, I don't want to come out inside out, or my body parts in the wrong place or any number of things that can go wrong with the slightest miscalculation."

"True, but how are you going to explain how you're alive?" asked Harry.

"I'll try and keep a low profile, but I do have a cover story in mind if I need to be seen," responded Lily, who had a pretty shrewd idea how she was going to come out once the spell was performed. "Besides the people that need to know, they will get an explanation, at least as best as I can explain it, because technically I never died but at the same time you did."

"Everything you say that Lily, it gives me a headache," responded Ginny as she shook her head.

"I know, it does seem ridiculous but don't worry about it, I expect there are things you need to do, with a good, what would you say about fourth or so of the students not in the D.A. deciding to help out the Death Eaters," responded Lily with a frown. It was amazing that while many people were turned off by working for Voldemort, there seemed to be an equal amount of idiots ready to jump in their place.

"Like I told the others, I'll worry about it, I already have a pretty good list of names of people who I need to look out for and remove from the school, before Voldemort attacks it for real," said Harry. "And that day will come."

"Unfortunately," added Ginny before she decided to address something that had bothered her. She had a good idea, but she wanted Harry to clarify it. "Now, why didn't you kill Snape when you had the chance?"

"Other than the fact Harry promised me that it would be my pleasure to do so," commented Lily lightly, as her eyes narrowed darkly. The four people she blamed for what happened were Snape, Dumbledore, Wormtail, and Voldemort. Dumbledore and Wormtail were already taken care of, with Harry getting the pleasure of dealing with Voldemort. Snape had spilled part of the prophecy to Voldemort and had tried to get Voldemort to spare her, so he could have Lily for himself. It sickened Lily that he never once thought that she would never have anything to say about it. In fact, Snape period sickened her, but she was younger then and she did get a great deal of dark arts knowledge out of the deal, that allowed her to protect Harry from Voldemort's Killing Curse. "Actually there is a good reason, but I'll let Harry explain that one."

"I need a set of eyes and ears in Voldemort's Inner Circle, it was getting too dangerous for my other method to keep tabs on Voldemort, what I injected into Snape will allow me to see a detailed account of all of the Death Eater meetings, based on what I planted in his mind the last time he tried to use Legilimency on me," said Harry.

"Another reason I'm going to enjoy killing him by the way," added Lily with a murderous look in her eyes.

"It was a bit experimental but it should work," said Harry. "Snape won't suspect a thing, although I'm sure by now he is banging his head against the wall trying to detect that undetectable potion currently injected into his blood stream."

"Excellent," responded Lily. "He's on my short list of people who need to suffer for what has happened but that can wait. I understand you two have some celebration to do and I have some calculations I need to get on, so I'll get out of your way and you can get on with it."

"Right, night, Mum," said Harry.

"Yeah, good night, Lily," said Ginny.

"Good night both of you," responded Lily as she disappeared when Harry used the Resurrection Stone and Harry and Ginny turned to each other, before Harry pulled Ginny into a kiss. Tonight was a great night, nearly everything went off with a hitch, other than a few injuries to the members of the D.A.

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The news of the death of Albus Dumbledore on Hogwarts grounds had reached most of the Wizarding World and the Ministry of Magic as well. Amelia Bones had heard several complaints, from many of the parents of Hogwarts students who were giving the Ministry hell for not defending the school. No students were killed, which was a miracle, but many had joined in on the fight on both sides. There had been a list of names given to Amelia, of students who had been assisting the invading Death Eaters. The most obvious one was Draco Malfoy, who had left with the Death Eaters, but the others were worthy of investigation.

Most of the complaints were due to the Ministry not lending any Aurors. In fact, word from Hogwarts had not reached the Ministry until the Death Eaters had departed. The most accurate reports had been that Downfall had also been involved and had gotten captured. Once again, people were looking onto it, along with the fact that the Floo

Network was disconnected from Hogwarts during that time. Only a handful of people had the capability to do that.

Still the investigation behind Dumbledore's death, with Severus Snape as the suspect named by a credible witness in Harry Potter, would have to wait. Snape was missing, presumed joining Voldemort, another matter that Dumbledore was wrong about, adding to the list of many things that had been mistaken about. The funeral of Dumbledore would happen later today and as Minister of Magic, she was obligated to make an appearance. She walked from her office, to her Auror guard to meet them.

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The funeral took place just outside the Hogwarts grounds. It was a rather crowded scene, with nearly everyone who was important showing up. Many of them had their share of bad things to say about Dumbledore, but they showed up out of some obligation to pay their respects to Albus Dumbledore. Most of Hogwarts, students and teachers alike, had shown up as well, more than a few actually rather upset at a man that they looked up to having died.

Harry rose up, from the section of seats that he had sat with the rest of the D.A, the six leaders sitting in front. He felt he would be the perfect person to give a eulogy on the life and times of Albus Dumbledore. Even Dumbledore's own brother agreed, but Aberforth did not really seem the type to give big long winded speeches. Harry walked up, looking at the crowd, who had their eyes on them.

"Today we both celebrate and mourn the life of a very unique individual, in Albus Percival Wulfric Brian Dumbledore," stated Harry as the entire crowd looked at him, some sobbing, some looking indifferent, and he caught a few smug looks from certain politicians that he knew had clashed with Dumbledore. "Much like everyone, his life was filled with pluses and negatives. Still, he had his share of accomplishments in his one hundred and fifty three years of life. His work with Nicholas Flamel, his defeat of the dark wizard Grindelwald, and years of service as a public official. While many of Dumbledore's decisions in recent years have been called into question, his past speaks for himself and while this is a time of mourning, this is not

what Albus Dumbledore would have wanted. He had often called death the Next Great Adventure and whether or not he was correct matters little, but it was what he claimed death to be. I do not condemn you for grieving, but at the same time, Dumbledore's death marks not the end of an era, but a brand new day for the Wizarding World."

Harry paused as the members of the funeral nodded, some of them rather teary eyed but they nodded firmly, as the words of the Boy-Who-Lived sank in. It was true, great wizards died in the past and life went on, but many doubted they would ever meet anyone like Albus Dumbledore in their life, even though Harry Potter looked to have potential but he was young and it was too early to tell whether or not he would crack under the pressure of having too much power.

"The truth is that Albus Dumbledore's death ended with a mistake. A mistake he made that he trusted the wrong person with his life, but once again this does not erase the past achievements and there were many, of Albus Dumbledore," remarked Harry as he looked at the D.A. for a brief second, that few if any had caught that little glance that Harry gave his army. "Still, as we remember the life and times of Albus Dumbledore, I think many of us do share a hope that the next great adventure is one that is memorable. May he rest in peace, as we go into this new era, despite the troubling times that are certain to lurk ahead of us."

Harry walked without another word, turning to avoid his smirk at the fact that he had the crowd eating out of the palm of his hand. As he sat down next to Ginny, she had a similar look on her face. The rest of the funeral went on without much of an incident, as people paid their final respects to Dumbledore. Harry let them have their moment, it would be so easy to tear their hero down right now, but he would let the dozens of tell all biographies that would come out within the next few months that revealed the shady past of Dumbledore to do that. Sunshine and happiness did not sell books, rather people wanted to see the dark and the depressing, the real dirt in life.

“That matter is cleared up, I told Amelia to be on guard, because now with Dumbledore dead, I wouldn’t put it past Voldemort to try something daring,” remarked Harry, as he looked at Ginny, as they returned to the Room of Requirement after the funeral, as they walked forward, before looking towards several glass statues that had appeared in the Room. “Now, the Elder Wand...let’s see if it is as good as the legend says it is.”

Harry removed the wand from the bag; he still liked his old wand and was able to perform a great deal of advanced magic with it. He pointed it to one of the glass statues and a bright red light shot from the Elder Wand, without a moment of thought, destroying the statue. Normally when Harry did such a spell, the statue was reduced to fragments of broken glass but now it was completely blown to microscopic dust and in fact, Harry was not really sure if there was even that much of the statue.

“Wow,” said Ginny, which was all she could muster in the awe she saw.

“I barely even put any thought or effort into that spell, but it’s more powerful than any Reducto spell I’ve ever done,” responded Harry as he looked at the wand before he offered it to Ginny. Ginny took it, before she aimed it at the glass statue, visualizing the spell, just as the silent incantation barely echoed in her head, a red light shot from her wand. She blinked, it appeared to swerve slightly on its own accord as her aim was a bit off, but it struck its intended target. “And the shared wand idea appears to work.”

“I wonder what this wand can do,” remarked Ginny in awe as she looked in Harry’s eyes. “What the limitations are...”

“If there are any limitations, but we will find them, I think it might have the potential to break several of the laws of magic,” responded Harry, as he looked at the wand. “But it did seem a bit draining, it will take some getting used to.”

“Agreed,” said Ginny as she nodded her head. She felt the same thing, the wand had a bit more of a pull than hers and there was a great deal of magical power behind the spells. “This wouldn’t be used

day to day either...besides I like my old wand just as well. It does the job perfectly."

"Yes, Ginny, I feel the same way," said Harry as he put his hand on the back of her neck. "But certain things can't be done with our wands, that can be done with this one and we will figure it out together. Like for instance, food can't be conjured with a normal wand but I bet using this wand, we can bypass that little flaw."

"Agreed, but we have plenty of time to test the limitations later," responded Ginny, as Harry pulled her in tightly to an embrace, their lips pressing together. They felt warmth as they continued to kiss in the Room of Requirement, as it adjusted to accommodate their activities as they got more intense. They had the Hallows, but it was only an added bonus to their already great natural magical abilities.

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Astoria Greengrass sat on a chair in the hallway at Hogwarts, deep in thought, the day after the funeral and the day before the students were to leave for the summer. She had just gotten released from the Hospital Wing, in time to attend the funeral for Albus Dumbledore, sitting with the rest of the D.A. Harry's speech was great as always and there was a double meaning that only the D.A. got. Dumbledore deserved what he got and the world at large would never know.

Astoria now saw Draco Malfoy as exactly what he was. A conniving little bigoted coward who deserved to die and she was ashamed that she had ever liked him for even a moment. She felt as if she wasted several years of her life pining for someone who was not worthy of her attention and would never changed. Still ,it was a learning experience and she could devote her efforts towards the D.A. fully as it continued to expand to fight Voldemort and then realize Harry and Ginny's visions for the future, something that she felt she shared.

"So you finally realized what he was," said the quiet voice of Hermione and Astoria turned to see the older girl.

“Finally, you were right, in fact all of you would right, I can’t believe I would ever think he would change,” remarked Astoria who seemed more angry than upset.

“People do stupid things in the name of love or blind obsession, depending on how you look at the matter,” said Hermione as she reflected on her own mistakes, something that she would never allow herself to forget. When the Daily Prophet had mentioned that there were rumors that Downfall had been killed by Death Eaters, she was both relieved she was not actually Downfall and slightly disappointed as well. The events of the entire year had caused Hermione to make one of the biggest decisions in her life. Since she was of age, there was no use in staying in a world where the vast majority of people hated her.

“Astoria, how are you holding up?” asked Harry, as he walked on the scene with Ginny.

“I’m better once I got over him,” said Astoria as she also vowed to work ten times as hard, to prevent herself from being in that position and most importantly to justify the high opinion of her that Harry and Ginny both held.

“Good, he wasn’t right with you, he might not even live for much longer, Voldemort doesn’t forget,” responded Harry as he looked at Hermione, as if noticing her presence for the first time. “Oh, hi, Hermione.”

“Hi Harry, hi Ginny,” said Hermione as Ginny responded with a nod and a faint smile, before Hermione looked at the two individuals she perceived to be her only friends in the Wizarding World. “I’ve made a choice; I’m leaving after this year is over.”

“You’re leaving?” asked Harry in surprise as he looked at Hermione and Ginny obviously was a bit caught off guard. They both expected Hermione to be stubborn and stay despite the fact that most of the school hated her guts.

“Yes, I’m leaving Harry, Ginny, I can’t handle this any more, what’s the point in staying, when I become of age, I won’t be anything

anyway, unless I sell myself to some pureblood wizard who will use me as a toy,” responded Hermione as she looked at the two, almost expecting them to argue with her, to prevent her from leaving. “Mum and Dad agree with me, it just isn’t worth it, when I leave, I’m snapping my wand, burning all my books and I’m leaving, never looking back. This world has ruined my life, it’s a mess, someone needs to fix it.”

“Maybe one day,” said Ginny as she exchanged a knowing look with Harry but he nodded.

“Don’t worry, I will keep up with my potions, I still have a six month supply if I’m not mistaken,” responded Hermione and Harry nodded in confirmation. “Still, Mum and Dad have agreed, we need to get out of the country, I’ll see you my new address in a couple of days.”

“If that’s the way you feel Hermione, then we won’t do anything to stop you,” responded Harry as it would be much healthier for her and she would have a much less chance of a relapse if she was sent away.

“Good luck,” said Ginny with a smile.

“Yeah good luck, Hermione,” responded Harry, who never trusted her after the love potion incident but if she left, that would not be an issue.

“Good luck to you as well, beat him,” replied Hermione as she turned and walked away, with Harry and Ginny both doubting they would ever see her again.

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Draco Malfoy could hardly believe his luck. He was leading a small group of new recruits into a run down village, to secure a vital ingredient for a potion that the Dark Lord was created. To have such an important mission just showed how much faith the Dark Lord put in the name Malfoy. The village was rather run down and no humans lived here for many years. The moment Draco stepped forward onto the pavement, thick vines shot out, wrapping around him. The other Death Eaters were quickly tied up, with the vines crushing them.

“Devil’s Snare,” gasped one of the Death Eaters and sure enough, this appeared to be a particularly tough version of the deadly plant. The vines wrapped around them, one of them had been strangled already.

“Then light a fire...idiots,” gasped Draco, who managed to grab his wand, before he sent a blast of fire. The conscious Death Eaters managed to copy that motion, causing blasts of fire to cut through, ripping through the vines. The Death Eaters escaped, with Draco breathing heavily, his ribs were sore from where the vines had crushed them. “Right, what the Dark Lord wanted, it should be through here, in this shack.”

The shack had cobwebs hanging from it and Draco moved forward, pointing his wand at the door, before it unlocked. The Death Eaters followed him forward, walking inside, but one of them screamed. The fool had stepped on a rotted floorboard that had snapped and caused the floor underneath him to cave him. He fell below the shack.

“Careful, this floor is old but...found it,” said Draco as he looked forward. The vial of the swirling white and yellow substance was ahead, it was unlike anything Draco had seen and it had to be rare of the Dark Lord had sent him on this mission. Draco tapped his wand on the table, revealing a number of curses surrounding the vial, thus confirming that someone had lived here long ago and did not want this vial stolen. Draco quickly disabled all of the spells around the vial, before he reached forward, removing it from the table.

Suddenly, a grunt was heard and the Death Eaters turned around fearfully. A mountain troll had taken up residence in the shack and walked forward, raising its club. Several of the Death Eaters aimed their wands, but the troll oafishly swung the club, knocking them off balance, including Draco. Draco was staggered as the troll advanced on the other Death Eaters.

“REDUCTO!” shouted Draco, pointing at the ceiling. “REDUCTO!”

Two blasts had struck the ceiling, as it caved in. Blood dripped from Draco’s mouth but he was safe from the troll’s wrath, even though he

heard the screams from the Death Eaters that were trapped. He shrugged, the Dark Lord would reward him and quickly Draco moved forward, to use the Portkey he had on him to bring him back to the Dark Lord's stronghold, with the item in question.

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It was nearly a week after the end of the school year of Hogwarts Witchcraft and Wizardry and other than a few attacks; news on the Voldemort front appeared to be non forthcoming. That was actually more worrying than any number of attacks, as a silent Voldemort could be quite deadly.

Sirius walked in the house, thinking about this calm before the storm. Today, he, Harry, and Ginny were the only ones in the house right at this moment. It amused him how Ginny had managed to spend so much time with Harry and away from home without Molly Weasley knowing. Then again, Molly had not been the most mentally stable these days or at least that's what Sirius had heard.

Sirius walked down the hallway, when he had heard a loud explosion from about the area of the room where Harry and Ginny had stayed in together. At first, he disregarded it as a figment of his imagination, but a second loud explosion had put Sirius on guard. He quickened his footsteps, fearful that despite everything they have done to protect the house and shield it from Death Eaters, along with the fact that Harry and Ginny were extra careful, that they had managed to find them and ambush them. When the door was slightly ajar, with smoke disappearing into the air, Sirius quickly moved inside, pushing the door open, ready to attack any Death Eater.

"Harry, Ginny?" called Sirius as he walked into the room, it taking a minute to realize who had had seen sitting on the bed right beside Harry and Ginny. "Are you...LILY?"

Sirius stared, mouth wide open, eyes widened in shock, shaking his head from side to side in pure disbelief, as he saw a sixteen year old version of Lily Evans, sitting right next to Ginny, with Harry on Ginny's other side.

“Good afternoon Sirius,” responded Lily cheerfully, as if there was nothing out of the ordinary of her being alive after all of these years of being believed to be dead.

Sirius looked at Lily for about a minute, before he did the only thing that made sense to him. He screamed like a little girl and fainted.

Yeah, Chapter Forty Two is done. The reason why Lily came out the age she did...well, an explanation is coming in the next chapter, but it should be obvious, at least I think so. Your interpretation may vary.

Everyone enjoy the Holidays and I will see you sometime this weekend/early next week for Chapter Forty Three with some Elder Wand related hijinx and Voldemort makes an important move towards his ultimate goal. Oh and Draco may go on another death defying suicide mission from Voldemort, this one a bit more dangerous than the last one, but we shall see how things work out. Luck only got him out this time and the miniscule amount of cunning he possesses as well.

See you again after a little while.

Chapter Forty Three: Powerplay

Ginny and Harry exchanged a look after Sirius had hit the floor in a dead faint but Lily could not contain herself for a second. She burst out into laughter, as Sirius laid on the ground, obviously in shock at what he saw.

“He fainted,” said Ginny as she and Harry joined in laughing with Lily as Sirius laid on the floor, obviously not quite over the shock he had just experienced.

“I guess the shock of you being here, alive, must have been a bit too much for him,” responded Harry as Lily stopped laughing, before she looked at Sirius, before rolling her eyes.

“He’s such a drama queen, sometimes,” muttered Lily as she reached forward towards the Elder Wand, which was still on the bed with Harry and Ginny. “May I borrow this?”

“Of course,” responded Harry, as Lily grabbed the Elder Wand before she pointed it towards Sirius. She held the wand towards Sirius and a large blast of ice cold water struck Sirius. Sirius sprung up to his feet, looking at Lily, breathing heavily.

“Thanks I needed that...LILY!” shouted Sirius, but Lily blasted a loud bang into the air, causing Sirius to stand up straight and stiffened, as

“Don’t you dare faint again,” commanded Lily as she looked at Sirius, with Harry and Ginny both looking extremely amused.

“You’re supposed to be dead, what in the hell happened?” demanded Sirius as he looked at Harry, before his face brightened in acknowledgement. He had figured out what was going on here. “Ah, I see Harry, this is a prank, isn’t it? Which one of your friends is it?”

“Sirius, I swear on my parent’s graves this isn’t a prank,” responded Harry as he looked at his godfather seriously and Sirius responded, looking out a fish out of water. “This really is Mum and...it’s a long story.”

"You were dead," responded Sirius as he looked at Lily, unable to formulate another response besides that.

"Well I recovered," answered Lily with a smirk, which caused Harry and Ginny to unable to formulate a straight face. "As Harry said, it is a long story, but it's not like you have anything better to do."

"No, for some reason, people in the Wizarding World aren't too thrilled about associating with a past prisoner in Azkaban, even though he has been cleared," remarked Sirius with a slight note of bitterness before his face brightened up. "In the Muggle world when I venture out there on the other hand, it seems like I can't keep the women off of me, when I mention that I had been imprisoned for twelve years..."

"Moving along right now Sirius, this all starts fifteen, nearly sixteen ago, when Voldemort tried to attack us, which I figured was going to happen. I trusted Peter, unfortunately, because if I hadn't, I would have put my foot more firmly down on Dumbledore's Secret Keeper plot and had just fled the country," remarked Lily as she remembered what had occurred all those years ago, the few arguments that her and James had about the best way to go into hiding. James had been adamant about trusting Dumbledore but Lily had told him that they should make this decision themselves, hinting that she did not trust Dumbledore, even though James had never picked up those hints. "The switch actually was something that might have thrown Voldemort off for a few months, if Peter had not turned traitor. Meanwhile, I had been working on something that would eventually save Harry, allow me to remain alive to protect him from Dumbledore's inevitable meddling, and hopefully rid the world of Voldemort. Everything went wrong, unfortunately."

Lily paused, deep in thought of how to best explain the magic behind what she did and eventually how she got back to the land of the living.

"After a couple of years of research, I stumbled upon something that most witches and wizards would only dream of discovering, that would be a way to block the unblockable, that being the Killing Curse," said Lily and Sirius paused, he was surprised, it was said to be impossible. Then again, coming back from the dead was also

believed to be impossible and if this was Lily, she had done that. “I know, everyone would want to know it but trust me, it was more trouble than it was worth and required the self sacrifice, at least temporarily, of one person. In that case that was me, I had managed to perform the charm on Harry, as Voldemort was killing James. He was unfortunate enough not to have his wand on him...”

“Figures,” muttered Sirius, James was his best friend but he sometimes lacked common sense. Even if Sirius would have went into hiding under the Fidelius Charm with someone he trusted, he still would have had his wand on him at all times. There was a chance that the person he thought he could trust could be blocked or at least blackmailed into giving up the secret. Or like Peter, he could have turned traitor. The last thing Sirius would do was not have a wand on him.

“Voldemort came by, telling me to stand aside so he can kill Harry, as if that was going to happen,” responded Lily as she rolled her eyes. “He almost looked like he intended to spare me and I learned the reasons why later, as much as it sickened me. After a while, Voldemort lost his patience and send the Killing Curse at me. My shield had worked, while my body was dead, my soul was latched onto Harry’s.”

“Unfortunately, one slight miscalculation that had not encountered for someone with an already splintered soul had not been taken into account, someone with Horcruxes, and thus once Voldemort threw a Killing Curse at me, his body was destroyed as Mum intended, but a rather sizeable piece of his remaining soul latched onto the cut that was created by the backlash of curse, creating the infamous scar, with the remaining bit that would eventually become the Voldemort we face today fleeing to Albania,” said Harry and Sirius looked terrified at a piece of Voldemort living within his godson. “Don’t worry, it’s gone now, destroyed after the incident in the graveyard, I absorbed all of Voldemort’s knowledge, gaining decades of magical knowledge, along with a disturbingly huge amount of insight on how Voldemort things.”

“Which has helped up in a number of ways in the past couple of years,” added Ginny with a smile, as she held hands with Harry

triumphantly. The number of Death Eaters that Downfall had managed to effortlessly put down was living proof of this.

“Anyway, Harry had survived being killed by Voldemort, but I had some amount of awareness, as my consciousness was in his mind, seeing my dead body was...surreal to say the least,” said Lily quickly. “I was happy when I saw you showed up, I arranged to have instructions sent to you, on how to undo the ritual, telling you to get my body and how to return to me. Once Hagrid showed up to take Harry, I winced. You really should have convinced him to take Harry with you, but I guess you really wanted revenge instead of doing your duty as godfather. I’m really disappointed with you Sirius, I thought you would have had your priorities straight.”

Sirius looked at the floor. Truthfully, he had mentally berated himself for similar reasons in the past, he should have been more firm with Hagrid, but his mind was on Pettigrew. Before he had caught the true nature of Dumbledore, he had thought he should have told Dumbledore about the switch. Naturally this was all before it came out about what Dumbledore had done, that he knew that Peter was switched, that he had basically pushed Peter right into the service of Lord Voldemort. Still that was taken care of, with Peter and Dumbledore both dead.

“However, I won’t talk about this for too long, because you are way at the bottom of list of people who I should blame for what happened to Harry, I suppose I should have expected this to happen from you, but what Dumbledore did next, really upset me, by then, I guess he might have figured it out and sent up those blood wards that were supposed to protect Harry,” said Lily as she sighed once again in irritation. “In theory, they would have, although they did have one flaw, they did not protect Harry from the blind prejudice of the people inside the house and the real protection laid with Dumbledore’s interests. If I was around, then he couldn’t guide Harry properly. Just like he did not lift one finger to get you a trial. And it nearly worked, had the Triwizard Tournament not happened and Hermione had her moment of grand stupidity showing her true colors, leaving the door open for this young lovely young lady and the rest is history.”

"Of course, we would not have known about this had it not been for the Resurrection Stone, one of Voldemort's Horcruxes, until I destroyed it, one of the three Deathly Hallows, I trust you've heard the legend," said Harry and Sirius nodded, as a pureblood he had obviously heard the story of the Deathly Hallows, at one point when he was young. "Well, the old cloak was one of them."

"Wait a minute, the Invisibility Cloak is THE Invisibility Cloak," responded Sirius in surprise. Truthfully he had thought it was strange that the Invisibility Cloak had belonged to James's father and had been passed on to James, then to Harry and Invisibility Cloaks normally did not last more than fifteen or twenty years, at most. Some lasted less than ten years. That had to be the only explanation.

"Yes, I know, but I have two of the Hallows and I had three once I defeated Dumbledore, as I told you I would," responded Harry and Sirius nodded in response. "Sure it was an underhanded and devious victory, but I beat Albus Dumbledore in a duel, just like I'll beat Voldemort next time I fight him. Proving that no matter what, I don't lose."

"Yes, Harry is the greatest wizard who ever lived," responded Ginny with an adoring smile. "No one can touch him, except for me and that's in an entirely different manner entirely but that's neither here nor there."

"Right, as Harry was saying, before he decided to go on his ego trip, which is well earned anyway as he is that good, but anyway, Ginny and Harry used the Resurrection Stone to contact me, which brought me back, freed me from Harry's subconscious in a way," explained Lily. "Partially, as those blood wards had did their share of damage and no wand would have enough power save for one. The Elder Wand was the one that could do the job and judging by the result you see before you it worked, in a way. Given the fact that Harry was the one that was performing the ritual, a sixteen year old body was about the only one that we could manage without blowing up the house, which actually might be a bit easier

"Indeed, the ritual had to be done perfectly," added Ginny. "That's why we sealed ourselves in this room and put silencing charms

around the room, but as you heard, that only worked until the charms were completed. The first explosion you heard was Lily's new body being created and the second explosion was her transferring her soul from Harry's body into her new body."

"And it was a success, especially creating a new body with clothes already on it, with no blood, bones, or flesh from other people needed, just a lot of charm work, but I made a lot of calculations and my body will hold up for the normal life span of a witch, in fact it might be better than ever, with all the self healing charms that have been added as an added incentive," responded Lily, before she smiled at Harry and Ginny. "That doesn't mean I can't get hurt, but it will take a lot more to hurt me, just like it will take a lot more to hurt you, because the same self healing spells have been added to your bodies as well, not to mention some form of heightened endurance and reflexes, although I'm not sure to what extent it is but I'm sure you'll find out soon enough. A bit of a side effect..."

"But a welcomed one," said Ginny in surprise, as she exchanged look at Harry.

"And unexpected as well," responded Harry with a smile as he looked at his mother, who looked back with a smile. "I don't remember you mentioning anything about that."

"Well to be fair, I didn't know if it was going to work as I intended or not but since it did, it would be the perfect time to tell you of what I did," said Lily before she looked at both of them. "As I said, it will take more to hurt you, but you still can and may get hurt, just like Voldemort can get hurt after a fair amount of punishment despite all he's done to himself. So, what I'm trying to say is that don't do anything heroically stupid like throw yourself in front of a Killing Curse that was meant for someone else. You do have your limitations, even if there is only a slight chance you will ever reach them.

"Right," said Harry as Ginny nodded in agreement as well.

"So let me get this straight, Lily, you were dead, but because of some ritual did, you came back to life, after your soul had been bound to Harry's, your sixteen year old body recreated by some kind of ritual,

with improvements,” responded Sirius slowly, as if he was trying to wrap his finger around what happened, but he could not believe it. Lily had broken several laws of magic simultaneously with what she did, if it really Lily. Despite everything she said, Sirius had a few doubts. Harry and Ginny believed her to be genuine and they were rather sharp, few could fool them collectively.

“Well technically I never did die, only my body stopped functioning,” responded Lily calmly. “I know it’s hard to believe Sirius, but trust me, for all intents and purposes I’m the same person you knew. Just I returned a bit de-aged, but it was much easier this way. Besides, it would give me a much easier cover this way, as the past of a teenager is easier to fabricate than the past of an older person, if the wrong people come nosing around.

“It really is you then, Lily,” responded Sirius.

“Yes, of course it really is her Sirius, would I lie to you?” asked Harry. “Sure I’ve been known to bend the truth a time or two, when it serves me but it is really for the benefit of everyone else.”

“Just wait until Moony comes back, I don’t think he’ll believe this, I don’t even believe this and you explained it to me,” responded Sirius in an awed voice before he looked at Lily, who promptly answered his unasked question.

“Now, James is still dead, as far as I know,” responded Lily calmly. “He’s gone, I loved him but no amount of angsty bitching is going to bring him back, so I’ve gotten over him, I’m sure he’s enjoying his life in the great beyond. In fact, romance on a personal level for me, bores me. My time is much better devoted in helping with the necessary changes, along with wiping a few Death Eaters out whenever I can.”

“Sounds like a plan, speaking of which, someone is trying to contact me,” said Harry, as he held up the Portkey, hearing Luna’s slightly scrambled and rather distorted voice on the other end. “If you can hear me Luna, hang a second, you’re breaking up, something is interfering with the communication link, let me fix it so I can hear you properly.”

"Here," remarked Lily, as she tapped her wand to the Portkey, causing the distortion to fade. She knew exactly what to do because it was a combination of two of her ideas, although Harry's modification served well. It did remind her that she needed to get a new wand.

"Harry, can you hear me now?" asked Luna in a concerned voice over the Portkey link.

"Yes, Luna, I can hear you, Ginny's right here with me, what do you have to say?" asked Harry. "Is anyone hurt?"

"No, well not in here, Dad and I are both fine, but did you hear the news?" asked Luna. "There was a strange disturbance in the magical magnetic spectrum just an hour ago..."

"The magical magnetic spectrum?" asked Harry.

"That's just a fancy term of saying there was an imbalance in the amount of magic in the air, but it sounds much cooler as well," explained Luna.

"Right, we got you," said Ginny as Harry also nodded, even though Luna could not see him doing so.

"Right, Luna, we understand continue, exactly what kind of disturbance," said Harry.

"Oh, just that the entire Floo Network had been knocked out and there had been a heavy number of splinching accidents, from people who had been Apparating for years," responded Luna calmly. "Several small tremors as well, it shook us up really good around here and explosions, there was a loud one in London that rocked the entire city, around your area. I'm surprised you didn't feel it."

"Oh believe me Luna, I felt it, considering it was Ginny and I who caused it," said Harry.

"Experimenting with new spells, Harry?" asked Luna in a concerned, but somehow curious voice.

"No, it was nothing major, just a charm to bring my mother who was trapped in the limbo between life and death back into the real world," responded Harry.

"Oh, is that it, I thought it was something more serious," answered Luna if that did not even surprise her at all and was not out of the ordinary. "You're going to have to tell me the story about that though, because I'm intrigued."

"Believe me, we'll explain it to the D.A. Leaders when we need to," answered Harry.

"Yes, you took it a lot better than Sirius did, he screamed like a little girl and fainted," added Ginny which caused Sirius to glare at her and Lily to burst out into laughter.

"I wish I would have seen that, but anyway, I have to go right now," remarked Luna as the connection closed, with Harry and Ginny turned to each other.

"That must be Moony," remarked Sirius as he heard a door close. "Ready to go give him a heart attack, Lily?"

"Of course, we'll leave these two alone," said Lily as she gave Harry and Ginny a brief nod, before she followed Sirius from the room.

"Alone at last," responded Ginny as she looked at Harry, putting locking spells and silencing charms around the room.

"Let's not waste a moment of time," said Harry, as he pulled Ginny onto his lap, kissing her neck, as she ran her fingers through his hair.

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Amelia Bones scrambled throughout the Ministry. Everything was in disarray over the last couple of hours. The Floo Network was completely shutdown, Merlin forbid anyone who had tried to use it during the time that magical disturbance, it would be hell trying to get them out. People were running around, correcting Splinching

accidents and she feared it was something that Voldemort might have done, to mess up magical travel. Portkeys were taking people countries away from their intended destination, with everything just barely settling down.

"Azkaban, is everyone present and accounted for there?" asked Amelia, who also feared this would be a creative way to mask a breakout. Scrimgeour walked up to her, nodding, looking rather dazed.

"Everyone is accounted for, the Portkey managed to only drop me three rooms away from where I wanted to go this time," responded Scrimgeour, as he brushed soot from his shoulders. "Unfortunately it was right by the Floo Regulation Department, once they had failed to get their main fireplace back and it exploded and well you can see the results right here."

"No breakouts, other than the one that happened a week ago," responded Amelia and Scrimgeour clarified it with a nod, which was a tremendous weight off of her shoulders. That breakout last week, twenty people escaped and not all of them were convicted Death Eaters, just desperate witches and wizards taking advantage of their freedom, by joining with Voldemort. Since Downfall had been captured and presumed to be killed by Voldemort, Death Eater attacks had gotten more daring. Even though he was an illegal vigilante, he did keep Voldemort's followers somewhat in check by his creative and often disturbing methods. "The Wizengamot meeting, I might have to send a message, saying its going to be called off, as most of the people will need to Floo in."

"No kidding, I tried to contact more Aurors, who have their days off today, to clean up this mess but so far, nothing," responded Scrimgeour, who was very skeptical about giving Aurors a day off here and there in the middle of a war. Once again, Ministry laws mandated it and too many Aurors would pitch a fit if they tried to take away the off days. "But it has to be done, let's hope we can figure out what went wrong."

"If what you're saying is right, the problem looks to be correcting itself," said Amelia. "Once we get the Floo up and running again, we

should be in the clear. Until then, I've sent out the word to discourage people from travelling by Apparation, it's just too much of a risk right now and headaches the Ministry don't really need. Until we find that its safe, alternate methods of travel would be the only way to go."

"Yes, I'll keep my eye out for anything peculiar, in case he is behind this strange magical disturbance," responded Scrimgeour. "I don't envy you, Amelia, you have a lot of work ahead of you."

"True, unfortunately," responded Amelia with a sigh, it would be a long next few days, in fact the foreseeable future would be dark and uncertain. The evacuation plans were in place, with each department having back up plans of their own. She found herself looking over her shoulder as well, taking Harry's warnings to heart, about the fact that Voldemort could try something and attack her. She had several senior Aurors on rotating shifts, checking and double checking people who had come near her office, she was taking no chances. If she died, Scrimgeour would be Minister and even though he was good at running his department, Amelia had her doubts that he could stand up to the pressure of running the Ministry of Magic.

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Draco Malfoy returned from his latest mission, dripping from blood, with several other Death Eaters, who looked shaken up themselves, but had been among the few who had returned in one piece. The group staggered, with Draco holding a horn from a rare breed of unicorn. He had to jump through hoops to get it, with the goblins who had guarded it not wanting to give it up without a fight. They took their shots before going down.

"I would not go in there if I were you, Draco," responded Rodolphus Lestrangle who had looked at Draco with a bit of a smug expression. "The Dark Lord is in a towering temper, his latest project had gone awry, that magical disturbance in the air had cause it to explode in his face. Months of work, down the drain, but naturally he is not injured, only his pride."

"You mean the Dark Lord was not responsible for that?" asked Draco in surprise, he had heard the news, when he was fleeing, and

Rodolphus shook his head. "Our Portkey transported us across several streets from here, we had to kill the Muggles inside before they saw us, but it was no less than they deserved. It was a bit of a walk but we still hung onto the spoils of my great victory."

"You were lucky, you should have heard about the person who wanted to visit his family in Australia and he ended up in Antarctica," remarked Rodolphus with a chuckle.

"HAVE THOSE FOOLS RETURNED WITH THE HORN?" thundered Voldemort angrily from inside the next room and Draco winced, the Dark Lord sounded really angry. Whatever had been messed up had been something that was of great value to him, otherwise he would have not flown into such a violent rage.

"Y-y-es my Lord," said Rodolphus. "Malfoy and the others, they have the horn, they just returned a couple of moments ago."

"What took them so long?" asked Voldemort icily

"The Portkey malfunctioned my Lord, we were sent off course, we returned as soon as possible," responded Draco in a slightly shaky voice, as he clutched the horn in his hands, the other Death Eaters also looked at each other.

"That should not have been an excuse, you should have returned on schedule," said Voldemort coldly, in an displeased tone of voice. "I will offer you the benefit of the doubt, as you actually did return with the horn and allow you to live, but you will step inside for your punishment, is that clear?"

"Yes, my Lord," said Draco, as he walked into Voldemort's main quarters, a foul, repugnant smell filling his nostrils, that turned his stomach. The Dark Lord extended his hand and Draco handed him the unicorn horn, before Voldemort held his wand. Draco waited.

"Crucio," said Voldemort calmly and Draco screamed in agony, being tortured for twenty seconds, which seemed like an eternity. He collapsed, panting, as the Dark Lord releases the spell. "I will summon you once I need you once again."

“Yes, my Lord,” said Draco in a pained voice, as he left, barely able to stand from the short but intense round of the Cruciatus Curse and the pain it brought. The Dark Lord watched him leave, the disgust in his eyes was unhidden. His work was wasted now, but the unicorn horn could be useful for something, being a rare ingredient.

That explosion that happened set Voldemort’s work back by a year, his work to punish anyone who befouled his name with their worthless lips. He intended to create a Taboo on his name, because anyone who dared utter his name would be killed. Unfortunately, a Taboo took time and many rare ingredients to properly create. That disturbance had erased all that hard work and ruined all of his carefully secured ingredients.

When he found out who had created that disturbance, Voldemort planned on killing them slowly and painfully. The idiotic witch or wizard who had done so would be punished beyond everything that had been ever imagined.

Right now, he shifted his attention to the plans he had for the overthrow of the current government in charge of the Ministry of Magic and a potentially valuable association that he could make.

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At Number Twelve Grimmauld Place, Lily walked around. Remus took things a bit better than Sirius did, well at least she thought so. She was judging by the fact that he did not faint. It took a lot less time to explain everything, but she was sure that Sirius would fill him in on some of the more specific details. Harry had just gotten back, he was pleased, he must have passed the law through which the maximum age to serve on the Wizengamot was lowered by one year and more or less, the age of majority for most of those people. It was the first meeting after the chaos that had stalled the Ministry’s operations. Ginny looked equally happy, and for good reason. She would be out of the clutches of Molly Weasley, a woman whose controlling nature disturbed Lily to no end. She had half of a mind to give Molly a piece of her mind, especially when she acted as if she

was Harry's mother. In fact, Molly had to be control of everything, in every place she had gone.

Speaking of people who needed to be control, that stupid portrait had woken up.

"FOUL MUDBLOOD!" shouted Mrs. Black angrily, as she looked at Lily with disgust. "HOW DARE YOU COME BACK TO LIFE? HOW DARE YOU BEFOUL THE HOUSE OF MY FATHERS? YOU ARE A WRETCHED LITTLE..."

"You call me wretched, when your husband might be a distant cousin, knowing how you purebloods work," responded Lily and Mrs. Black looked angered beyond belief.

"YOU DARE INTERRUPT ME, YOU MUDBLOOD WHORE!" shouted Mrs. Black. "LORD VOLDEMORT DID THE WORLD A SERVICE..."

"I'm going to do the world a service by taking you down," said Lily but Mrs. Black looked smug.

"Permanent sticking charm, Mudblood, you can't get me down," said Mrs. Black. "So unless you blow up this entire house, I'm not leaving any time soon."

"Don't tempt me, you old bat," responded Lily as she looked at Mrs. Black, with Harry, Ginny, Remus, and Sirius walking forward.

"What's the matter?" asked Remus but he caught sight of Mrs. Black, who looked utterly disgusted, her mouth open, no doubt with some rant about werewolves and half breeds on the mouth.

"Is there really any way to remove her Sirius, without me having to bulldoze this house?" asked Lily.

"I wouldn't blame you if you did bulldoze it but my mother, in her height of insanity, had put a permanent sticking charm on the back of it," said Sirius but Harry and Ginny exchanged a smile.

“YOU FILTHY CHILDREN COULDN’T REMOVE ME IF ALBUS DUMBLEDORE COULDN’T!” shouted Mrs. Black.

“I beat Albus Dumbledore, so a foolish painting isn’t going to stop me,” responded Harry. “And I will beat your half blood Dark Lord as well.”

Ginny pulled out the Elder Wand and put a silencing charm on Mrs. Black. Normally this would not work but she was struck dumb. A rant that she had about befouling the Dark Lord would be heard from no one.

“This is the Elder Wand and this will remove that troublesome permanent sticking charm, because it can break several laws of magic, as proven when we conjured edible food the other day,” responded Ginny before she turned to Harry. “Harry, would you like to do the honors?”

“Of course, Ginny,” said Harry as he took the wand from her and pointed it. The painting fell off the wall, right at their feet, and Mrs. Black gave some silent shouts as Harry turned to Sirius. “What do you want me to do with this thing?”

“Burn it for all I care, Harry,” responded Sirius with a shrug and a loud pop echoed, as Kreacher appeared.

“NO!” yelled Kreacher as he threw himself right in front of the painting. “KREACHER WON’T! KREACHER WON’T!”

“Kreacher get away from that painting,” ordered Sirius, but despite the fact that it pained Kreacher, he disobeyed the order, banging his head against the painting, but still hanging onto it nevertheless.

“Let’s put it this way, Kreacher, move away from the painting or you burst into flames with it,” threatened Lily.

“Mudblood won’t tell Kreacher what to do, Mudblood should have died...” ranted Kreacher but Harry raised the Elder Wand, putting a shield up around them, before green balls of flame shot out. Kreacher looked at the flames; his fingertips on the painting, for it struck them

in the back. Kreacher gave an anguished shriek, as the fire consumed him. He still tried to valiantly protect his beloved Mrs. Black to the end, until the flames consumed him and then consumed her. The silencing charm was dropped in time for Mrs. Black's screams to echo throughout the house for a moment before she was reduced to absolutely nothing.

"Harry?" asked Remus in surprise, he had never really expected Harry to follow through on Lily's threat, he had actually expected Lily to snatch the wand and do it herself.

"He was warned," responded Harry as Ginny looked at him, with an adoring expression on her face at how he took charge of the situation.

"Have I mentioned how much I loved you today?" asked Ginny as she looked in Harry's eyes.

"Not today, but it's much appreciated," said Harry. "Of course, I could tell you but I'd rather show you."

Ginny and Harry walked off as Sirius and Remus looked a shocked. They were not disturbed just shocked.

"It had to be done," said Lily who looked proud at what her son did.

"I know, but saying it had to be done and it actually being done is two different things," responded Sirius and Remus nodded in agreement. "Just a bit disturbing to see a house elf, even one I hated, bursting in flames."

"I warned him, as Harry said, he didn't obey you either, most house elves would have gotten drawn out punishment for that," responded Lily nonchalantly as she walked off to her room on the other end of the house.

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Neville Longbottom would be getting his spot on the Wizengamot officially within the next week. The new law had gotten passed through would ensure that he would get it sooner but he could wait

the week. Meetings were becoming few and far between recently anyway and from what Harry told it, it was just a bunch of laws being tweaked to fit a war time world better.

He had gotten some bad news recently; his parents had taken a turn for the worse. The people at St. Mungos had tried everything, but nothing worked. The Lestranges and Barty Crouch Jr. did their damage, it was likely they were under the Cruciatus Curse for hours and were left in their house for another couple of hours before they were found. In that time, vital treatment could have been given, to save their sanity but sadly it did not work. Even Harry and Ginny had not be able to find anything that might help, most treatments were to be administered within a few hours of being tortured and that was only for people being tortured for only a few minutes.

Neville braced himself for the inevitable. His grandmother was taking it really bad but the truth was that Neville actually felt that it would be better off if his parents had died with dignity, instead just being made to suffer. Would he be glad if they had a miracle recovery? Yes, he would be glad if that was the case, but there was no use in stringing along on false hope that something might improve. It would be better off if he would know for sure.

Harry did tell him that he had big news, that he would share with the other D.A. leaders, when they returned to school or when Voldemort decided to take over the Ministry, depending on what ever came first. Neville could hardly wait, as Harry had rarely been prone to exaggeration.

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“WHAT?” shouted Molly Weasley in a loud voice, as she had just been dropped with a bombshell by her daughter, who sat right beside Harry, in the kitchen of the Burrow, which had seen better days. Ever since Arthur died, she could have cared less and stopped with the upkeep of the Burrow. “What do you mean you’re going to be of age when you’re sixteen?”

“Exactly what I’ve said, I’m going to be of age in three weeks and I’ll be out of here,” responded Ginny.

"Now, listen here, young lady, I heard about that law, I didn't agree with it, children being on the Wizengamot at that age, but since you're not on the Wizengamot, so you will still do as I say for another year," responded Molly, who looked angered that her daughter would dare defy her in such a manner.

"You see, I do have a Wizengamot position, the old Dumbledore seat, Harry bought it, to keep it out of less desirable hands," remarked Ginny. "He gave it to me, because he thought I could use it, to make something out of my life, unlike certain people."

"Well, I forbid it," said Molly, who was relieved that Harry had thought to get his hands on the Dumbledore seat before anyone else, but shocked that he had decided to give it to Ginny. She had to have put Harry up to him, Harry would have never done anything so irresponsible. It was just like Ron and the car in their second year. Harry was too nice for his own good sometimes. "You will never serve on the Wizengamot, you're too young."

"You know what, Mum, I'm not too young, I've done things that you have never had the ambition to do, because you decided to maintain the status quo, so in fact, I will be on that Wizengamot seat, you have no say about that, Harry is the only one who has the say of what I do, with that life debt he has from when he saved me in the Chamber of Secrets," responded Ginny.

"Harry, tell Ginny what she's to do?" asked Molly, who knew Harry would do the right thing.

"Okay Ginny, you do owe me," responded Harry as Ginny looked at him, she knew this was coming. "As condition for your life debt, you are to do two things. Never listen to what your mother says ever again and take that seat on the Wizengamot. That's final."

"HARRY JAMES POTTER!" shouted Molly in surprise. "I don't know what's gotten into you young man but you better..."

"No, you will listen to me, the only reason you haven't lost this house is because of me, which I did mostly as a favor to Arthur, who I am at

a loss of how he put up with you all those years,” responded Harry and Molly looked outraged that she had been struck with a silencing charm. “Do you really think you have any right to tell me what to do? No, because no matter how hard you try, you are not and will never be my mother. Lily Potter is a brilliant, beautiful, sophisticated woman who worked tirelessly to help me survive Voldemort. You are nothing but a conniving, manipulative, shrew who does nothing but belittle her family and their decisions, thinking you have a right to bully everyone around you and run their lives. Bill left because of you. Charlie left because of you. Percy turned his back because of you. The twins opened their joke shop, mostly out of their own dreams but also to spite you, when you told them they would never make something out of their lives because of their lack of ambition. That’s rich coming from someone like you. But the twins proved you wrong And Ron, even left I heard, to work for the Twins, mostly to get away from you.”

Molly looked at Harry, outraged but she knew that Ginny had put these lies in his head. She should be settling down as a housewife in a few years, but obviously, that was far from her intentions. She was unable to move or respond.

“See what you did Mum, seven for seven, that must be a new record, you alienated us all,” added Ginny. “Because I’m leaving right now with Harry and I’m never coming back ever. You might say we’re too young, that we’re children, but we children are going to succeed where you adults have failed.”

“You might think you can contact the Ministry, to try and get me back, but one Floo Call and I can get you thrown into Azkaban, because it won’t take much to prove that you were mentally unstable after what happened to poor Arthur,” said Harry. “Ginny is leaving with me.”

“Good bye Mum, forever enjoy the rest of your life,” responded Ginny, as she turned to Harry and kissed him.

“Those spells will wear off in twelve hours, giving you plenty of time to think about what you’ve done and the fact you’ve driven all seven of your children away because of your attitude,” responded Harry as Ginny followed him. Molly sat, enraged, but paralyzed. She was all alone.

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Lord Voldemort walked into Gringotts, hood pulled over his head. He walked past a lobby that was mostly empty, and marched past the desks. He was to have a meeting with the most senior goblins of the bank, to form an alliance. The goblins benefitted from this alliance, but Voldemort also admitted that he some benefit. Right then, a group of very surly looking goblins walked from the meeting room, the leader looking right at Voldemort, with a superior expression on its face.

"Ah excellent, I have arrived for our meeting..." stated Voldemort.

"We've met," responded the lead goblin shortly. "And we've discussed your terms. While they may be amusing to some people, you have far more to gain from this then the members of the goblin nation do. The Ministry of Magic has been granted certain concessions but your mere presence will do nothing other than splitting us. We pride ourselves as being above such human nonsense. Other than cases of rogue goblins starting rebellions, most of our nation has coexisted, even though our relations with humans have been strained. So, Tom Marvolo Riddle, our answer to your little offer of alliance is a resounding no. There is far too much for us to lose and not enough to gain."

"I see, I could have offered you fortune and power," stated Voldemort.

"We have fortune and we have power already, just a few words and we could cause the economy in this country to collapse faster than Lucius Malfoy did when our cart ran him over some weeks ago," responded the lead goblin. "You are like many humans, you are like the worst of all of humanity, thinking yourself to be better because you have a small bit of power."

"I see if that is the way you feel than you must be punished with your insolence to Lord Voldemort," said Voldemort, who proceeded to move on with his backup plan, which would force the Ministry's hand in conceding power with him. It was not as cerebral as his original plan but it would be equally effective. Voldemort slashed his wand

and one of the goblin leaders screamed, as his body was sliced to ribbons. Blood splattered on the floor. Several of the goblin leaders dove at Voldemort, at the treachery, but Voldemort skillfully dodged their assaults, before several unfortunate goblins were struck down and fell to the ground, never to move again.

“Leave nothing of this human left!” shouted one of the goblins, as several goblin warriors moved in, wielding both swords and spears. Voldemort looked amused; such weapons were a poor substitute for magic. The amusement only lasted so long as a spear was impaled right into his shoulder. He gave an anguished hiss but pointed his wand.

“AVADA KEDAVRA!” shouted Voldemort and at least one of the goblins had been struck down. The spear had caused a nasty cut, but Voldemort transfigured it into a great snake. Voldemort bent down, speaking to the snake. “Kill as many as you can, but contain them.”

“Yes, master,” hissed the snake as it moved forward. Voldemort blew up the desk, causing debris to fly everywhere, along with one goblin who was crushed to death. Voldemort escaped Gringotts, perfectly aware of the ramifications of his actions. After the break in last year, goblin-wizard relations were at their lowest, this would push them over the edge and then his plans would move forward.

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Lily was reading the Daily Prophet, after breakfast the next day and her eyes widened.

“I think we might have a problem,” remarked Lily calmly to Ginny, Harry, Remus, and Sirius, who were also at the table, turning the paper.

Lord Voldemort Slaughter Senior Goblins; Gringotts Bank Closes Doors To Human Account Holders Indefinitely; Ministry of Magic and Wizarding Britain in Chaos Because of Cut Off to Gold; Worldwide Magical Economy to Collapse; Another Goblin Rebellion Looming?

And we'll leave Chapter Forty Three on that note. A few things happened in this chapter that will have huge ramifications for the foreseeable future in this story. See you again soon.

Chapter Forty Four: Rumbblings.

“Gringotts is closed?” asked Sirius in a horrified tone of voice as he looked at the others, who nodded grimly. “What’s going to happen, surely that the Wizarding World can’t function without it being open?”

“Considering that they have control of ninety five percent of the gold in this country, it does look grim,” commented Remus who tried to remain calm in a situation that was far from calming. “It’s happened before and the ramifications were dire, not only for this country but the world. October of 1929 was the last goblin rebellion, when they decided to pull all the gold and shortly there after, a series of shockwaves devastated the economy of the entire world. The United States of America was hit particularly hard, even though the magical government in that country was just in place to cover up incidents of magic. Still the goblins decided to be amusing over there, by deciding to alter the stock market quotations and thus cause chaos with that, with mass selling that crashed the market. To be fair, they were drunk.”

“Giving the goblins that much power is a mistake,” remarked Lily in irritation. “Why did we let them keep control of the gold after they nearly destroyed the world’s economy the last time?”

“Mostly because the Ministry has no one who is willing to take responsibility for the work that it takes to manage an economy, partially because they simply don’t have the resources, but partially because they don’t want to deal with the problems that will come if they mismanage people’s gold,” responded Harry, as he looked at everyone, he was glad he had a couple million galleons withdrawn from his vault, on the off chance that Voldemort would try something like this and he had a pretty good idea what his plan was after what happened.

“Think we might be able to talk to the goblins Harry, to get them to see that Voldemort is trying to use them as a pawn by forcing their hand in closing Gringotts,” said Ginny who was thinking along the same exact lines that Harry was. Harry looked thoughtful at this but Lily looked extremely skeptical at the likelihood of this happening.

"Negotiating with the goblins?" asked Lily in amusement. "A good idea in theory and it may work short term, but for all the complaining that goblins do about wizards breaking agreements, no one has broken their word more than the goblins. They are far from innocent. I don't blame you for wanting to negotiate, it would be a good move for Harry, for both of you, to make you look good, but the goblins would back off from their word, the moment it doesn't really suit them."

"True, that's a good point, but if Voldemort gets word through the Ministry that he has a plan to make the goblins cooperate, by taking control of the bank by force, and quite a few of them would go for it right away, forgetting that he was one that caused this entire mess in the first place," remarked Harry. "Amelia would never go for any alliance and I'm pretty sure Scrimgeour might not either, but there are still some loose ends that I haven't really gotten around to cutting."

"We'll leave negotiation open as a maybe, something that we might have to go for to keep the goblins at bay long enough, until the Ministry is taken control of and then we can deal with keeping the goblins in check," responded Ginny.

"Yeah, that would be for the best," said Sirius.

"Even though it would only be a temporary measure at best, as Lily rightfully said, they will go back on their word, but it's better than leaving Gringotts in the hands of Voldemort," said Remus but Lily looked very skeptical. It was obvious she had little faith of the plan negotiating with goblins actually working.

"It's not the worst idea, but I think I have a better idea," remarked Lily as the entire table looked at her, Ginny, Harry, Sirius, and Remus having their full attention on her. "Voldemort's going to try and overthrow the goblins, there might actually be more than a few goblins willing to listen to his demented ideals, for a higher position of power in the goblin nation. Any amount of negotiation will go sour the minute the goblins get bored with it. However, if you take control of Gringotts, the Ministry of Magic will be in your debt for restoring the magical economy."

"Taking control of Gringotts, as in overthrowing the goblins?" asked Harry thoughtfully as Lily nodded and he exchanged a look with Ginny, who gave an encouraging nod. Sirius and Remus were looking at all three of them like they had lost their minds.

"I don't know if this would work, Harry, Ginny, both of you have accomplished great things so far, far beyond anyone could imagine, but..." stated Sirius, as he struggled to find the right words and thankfully Remus was there to voice what Sirius has been thinking.

"As good as you are, attempting to fight the goblins might be biting off a little more than you could chew, don't you think?" asked Remus. "Voldemort might have killed several of them, but there were bankers, they might be tough, but skilled at fighting they aren't. According to this article, there were hordes of goblin warriors patrolling the bank, along with dragons and other nasty enchantments."

"What Remus is trying to say is that you would need an army to even get inside," responded Sirius and Lily just smiled, before she cleared her throat.

"Army, no problem, because I already have one, and unlike Voldemort, who takes anyone who is competent enough to hold a wand, I only take the very best," remarked Harry as he exchanged a look with Ginny, who smiled back at him.

"It has really come full circle, I mean, the D.A. was formed to get them proper training to be able to defend themselves from Lord Voldemort, but it was also formed with another purpose in mind," said Harry.

"Yes, to storm Gringotts and take the Hufflepuff Cup, but the plan you enacted was better, three people managed to make fools of the goblins after a short amount of time," responded Lily. "Imagine what one hundred D.A. members could do."

"Wait a minute, you're going to overthrow Gringotts, with an army of students?" asked Sirius, as if he feared for his godson's sanity.

"Not just any army of students, only the very best that Hogwarts has to offer that did not throw their lives away to Lord Voldemort, skilled in

advanced forms of magic beyond anything that the Ministry would allow to be taught and a well oiled machine with superb teamwork,” responded Ginny.

“Not to mention the Aurors I have under my employee and several more within the Ministry who owe me a favor or two and I intend to cash in on a big way,” answered Harry. “And you two, you will help too.”

“I suppose we have no choice,” said Sirius and Lily shook her head, with an intense look in her emerald green eyes, causing Sirius to be taken aback but Remus nodded in support. “Well I suppose it would be the best, we wouldn’t want anything to happen and you need all the help you can get.”

“And let’s not forget the ultimate weapon, that not even the goblins, through all their inventions and their bloodlust, could never hope to defeat,” added Lily as Harry and Ginny held up the Elder Wand, their hands on it. So far, with their experimentation, they had achieved some amazing things. With the goblins and their security measures, they could really put it to the test.

“Let’s get ready then, contact the D.A. leaders and try to sneak away all of the members when we can,” said Ginny.

“We have to move quickly, before Voldemort does,” responded Harry as he leaned forward and kissed Ginny. “I’ll see you later, I need to make a trip to the Ministry.”

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To say that the Ministry of Magic was in chaos would be an understatement. In fact, Amelia had found herself thinking that more times than she had ever would imagine. When Lord Voldemort was the least of her problems that really was a horrifying thought to stomach and with each passing hour, her problems appeared to escalate. The goblins shutting the humans out of Gringotts had caused a horrific domino effect of problems. The Ministry had funds that would keep it in operation as normal for a few weeks, but after that, they would suffer just like the rest of the Wizarding World. A

great deal of Aurors were out in Diagon Alley to stop the mass looting and rioting that occurred, when they had been shut off from their gold. Of course, Amelia doubted that all of these people had much gold to speak of; they just saw this as an excuse to cause chaos.

She had gotten more howlers today than she had in her entire life. People screaming that she was the worst Minister of Magic ever, that she doomed the entire country to collapse. Each and every howler brought new complaints, many of them justified, but most of them blown completely out of proportion. It was just an excuse to take her to task for everything that went wrong.

The goblins had refused to budge and had refused to even entertain any potential negotiations with the Ministry of Magic. They appeared to take some kind of amusement at the Wizarding World falling apart at a rapid rate. One of the goblins who had just decided to talk to the Ministry had stated that if the Ministry had dealt with Voldemort a long time ago, they would not be having this problem. Amelia bit her tongue, as the goblins had refused to do anything themselves regarding Voldemort, including freezing the vaults of convicted Death Eaters, despite Ministry requests. They had their own laws and had broken several agreements, while only honoring them when it suited them.

"It's the end, the world is falling apart," remarked Scrimgeour as he staggered into the office tired. "Two hundred people were arrested today and sent to Azkaban, not something I wanted to do, but as the country falls apart, we do have to maintain the peace. Several magically related disasters have hit London as well, people are outside of the Ministry right now, our wards should hold them off in the moment, but for how long?"

"Any Death Eater activities to report?" asked Amelia in a tired voice. She felt like she aged twenty years within the last few days.

"Other than the usual amount of activities, no and it's rather surprising, I thought they would take advantage of this," said Scrimgeour. "Not that I'm complaining, we have enough fires to put out right now, without the Death Eaters escalating their attacks."

"It's only just begun," responded Harry as he arrived, seeing both Minister Bones and Scrimgeour turning in surprise. "I thought I would stop by, because if I'm reading the signs right, you should be getting an unfortunate visitor that will stir up some trouble and throw the Ministry in disarray. Voldemort's attack of the goblins was not a misfire, I bet it was exactly what he planned."

"What does he want?" asked Amelia.

"The Ministry of Magic," remarked Harry in a calm voice and both Scrimgeour and Bones looked at Harry, shocked and appalled

"I can assure you we won't be giving it up without a fight, I'll put all staff on alert," said Amelia, but the look in Harry's eyes showed that he was a bit skeptical if this would really work.

"I'm sure you will do anything you can to keep the Ministry out of Voldemort's hands, but there are several people who may be willing to listen to him if it means getting Gringotts open, even by force," responded Harry and the two politicians exchanged a look, before nodding. He had spoken an all too realistic look.

"Point well taken, but what are we going to do?" asked Scrimgeour. "All we can do is try and keep the Ministry out of his hands, but as long as the goblins refuse to let us even negotiate, he always has that bargaining chip. I mean, what are we going to do, attack the goblins and force them to open Gringotts?"

"Whatever you think will work," responded Harry as he heard footsteps from outside the hallway. "I think he's here, right on schedule, for his attempt of negotiation."

"If that's him, you better not be seen here," said Amelia as Scrimgeour nodded, before making a move to make Harry a Portkey to get Harry out of there quickly but suddenly, Harry was gone.

Truthfully, he remained in the office underneath the Invisibility Cloak, as the door opened and he could hear the crash of several Auror guards hitting the floor. He sent a signal to Tonks to back off, but also remain ready, to see where this would go. Lord Voldemort himself

walked into the office, before he sat down in a chair right across from the Minister of Magic as if he owned the place. Scrimgeour reached for his wand, but Amelia shook her head.

“Good afternoon, Minister, Head Auror Scrimgeour, I have something to tell you that you might find useful,” remarked Voldemort in a pleasant, casually voice that was rather unsettling.

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“I thank you for coming here on such a short notice, as you’ve all heard by now, the Gringotts incident involving Voldemort has caused mass chaos in the Wizarding World,” responded Ginny, to the D.A. Leaders, with the other members of the D.A. arriving. Those who had, nodded calmly, as Lily stood in the background, magically concealed, waiting, watching, as Ginny took charge. She was not quite to reveal her presence to the group yet.

“Everyone is in an uproar, the looting of Diagon Alley, with the Ministry having to arrest loads of people,” inputted Neville.

“No one seems to want to get near Gringotts, they have dozens of goblin warriors outside the bank, along with dragons, and who knows what’s inside,” added Daphne.

“It’s disturbing, the goblins just won’t budge for anything, they won’t even here anyone out,” said Susan.

“I think the time has come where we stop being nice, which is why we’re here,” said Luna.

“Luna’s right, there is more to this Gringotts thing than meets the eye, at first it looked just like an attempt to sway the goblins went wrong, Voldemort attacked them and they acted, to stick it to all humans,” said Ginny. “However, the negotiation attempt was always destined to go wrong and I believe Voldemort must have always guessed that he would not get his way. Therefore...”

“This was his intention all along,” added Daphne with wide eyes. “With no bank, everyone is at his mercy and anyone who talks about

getting it back would be heard out by the Ministry, even if that person was...”

“Lord Voldemort,” said Neville grimly but Susan looked skeptical.

“My aunt would never go for anything Voldemort wants,” said Susan firmly but Ginny just gave her a reassuring smile.

“Harry and I both agree with you and I’m sure everyone else will agree too, but the problem is there will be many who will go for whatever Voldemort says, especially when they are very upset that they lost all access to their gold. Desperation, Voldemort has all the cards or so he assumes. His Death Eaters might not be all that happy with what he’s done, as they are cut off from their gold as well.”

“So what are we going to do?” asked Luna.

“It’s a daring plan, but the goblins will never negotiate and even if we catch them in a good mood, it will be unlikely to stick,” responded Ginny dismally. “However, there is only one thing to do. The D.A. might be able to pull it off, with a little help and Harry has the help he needs, all he has to do is say a few words. We can pull it off, but it won’t be easy. Far from easy.”

“You’re not saying...” said Daphne as her eyes widened and several of the D.A. members caught off. The conversation between the five D.A. Leaders had gone on, it was obvious they were thinking damage control and every one of them were awaiting what they could do best to help.

“Taking Gringotts by force, that seems...like an interesting way to solve the solution,” said Luna.

“Don’t get me wrong, the D.A. is great and all and the last two times we fought Death Eaters, we’ve come out on the better end, but they have dozens of goblin warriors around the bank, dragons guarding it, enchantments of all sort, and I don’t even know what else,” said Daphne.

“Better to die doing something, than live doing nothing,” remarked Luna calmly.

“Luna’s got a point,” said Neville. “We have to do something and no matter how extreme this plan sounds, what other choices do we have? The goblins have been controlling the economy in this country in the palm of their hands for too long, we need to take that back. They don’t follow our laws at all, so why should they control our gold?”

“It’s the way it always was, people don’t react fondly to change,” said Luna sadly.

“This is one thing that will change, no matter how much goblin blood we’ll have to spill,” said Ginny firmly. “It’s not the kindest solution to this problem, but the goblins have painted us with the same brush because of what Voldemort did. They forced our hand.”

“Okay, I’m convinced, it just might work, but please tell me Harry has a plan,” said Daphne.

“Of course we do and we will put it into action when Harry gets back,” said Ginny.

“Where is he anyway?” asked Susan.

“At the Ministry, to stall Voldemort,” said Ginny. “He should be here, offering the Ministry a deal, to give him control and he’ll get Gringotts back, right about now if I’m not mistaken.”

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“I believe my terms are more than acceptable, Madam Bones and Mr. Scrimgeour,” remarked Voldemort in a diplomatic voice. “You give me complete and total control of the Ministry, but you will still be Minister of Magic in name and to the public, along with most of the responsibilities, but all decisions based on Ministry policy will have to be approved by me. You also denounce Harry Potter as a fugitive of the law and make steps to arrest him for his crimes against blood purity, with everyone who wants to remain working at the Ministry

swearing a blood oath to me. In return, I will do everything in my power to restore Gringotts to be open to witches and wizards around the world. Those are my terms and I feel it is much better than the alternative that will happen.”

“Considering you got us into this mess in the first place, what reason should we have to believe you?” challenged Scrimgeour and Voldemort looked at Scrimgeour, a calm expression on his face, as if he was not bothered by this challenging statement, but secretly, he visualized torturing Scrimgeour within an inch of his sanity for his insolence.

“You have my word and the help of my friends, the Ministry of Magic has fell into disarray in recent years,” said Voldemort.

“Actually, until this incident, the Ministry of Magic has had its highest overall public approval rating in decades,” corrected Amelia.

“Be that as it may, how long with the general public be satisfied with their Ministry?” asked Voldemort calmly. “The Gringotts disaster had caused a potential disaster for the world and after what has already occurred in Diagon Alley, is you willing to wait until you have to put every witch and wizard in this country inside of Azkaban? A structure that has already proven to be easily breeched despite any pitiful security measures you place around it.”

Voldemort looked at the two politicians, his slit red eyes fixed on both of them, as he awaited their response. He decided to drop one other piece of information to ensure they understood who was in control.

“Also among the crowd gathered outside of the Ministry of Magic are many of my followers, who I can summon inside the Ministry, tearing your pathetic little enchantments down, and there are many more who work among you who would not hesitate in turning against you if you refuse to cooperate with Lord Voldemort. I dispatched of your guards outside with little effort,” said Voldemort. “I require an answer. Yes or no, will you agree to my terms?”

"I refuse to put the Ministry of Magic in the hands of someone who does not have the best interests of the people in this country in mind," said Amelia calmly.

"I second that decision," responded Scrimgeour and Voldemort just smiled at them.

"Then you have doomed yourselves and many others to a premature demise," said Voldemort as he raised his wand, pointing it at them but before he could strike, the chair underneath him blasted into toothpicks. Voldemort was caught off guard, before he came face to face with one of the last people he expected to face off on this day. "Potter!"

"Right here, Riddle," answered Harry, as he held his normal wand, ready to fight.

"I did not intend to kill you today, but it should be an unexpected pleasure," responded Voldemort, as Harry put a shield up, to block a pair of spells, allowing Scrimgeour and Bones to make their way to the fireplace, managing to Floo.

"I don't intend to be killed Riddle," said Harry, as they placed off, before Harry whipped his wand. Voldemort was blown right through the office door but as Harry stepped forward, the Dark Lord landed swiftly on his feet, before he faced off against Harry. A blast of a conjured black acid like substance was aimed right at Harry, who dodged the assault, before landing firmly behind Voldemort. Several Ministry officials in the hallway screamed as Voldemort was moving right towards them and a conjured dagger was deflected by Harry, right back against Voldemort. "Is that the best you have to give me, Riddle?"

"Potter, I've only begun to fight you, I will break you to prove to the world that you are a pathetic brat that got lucky once upon a time," said Voldemort as he slashed his wand towards Harry but Harry avoided the attack.

"Keep telling yourself that, Riddle and maybe one day, it will become true," taunted Harry, as he blasted a stairway to pieces behind him.

He hoped Minister Bones would have the lift disabled, but that stairway would be one way that could bring innocent people along with not so innocent people into the fray. "Nice bluff about the Death Eaters being out there by the way, not that anyone with half of a brain believed that. I do believe that you have some supporters working in the Ministry."

"Naturally, not everyone in this world is a fool," remarked Voldemort coldly, as he aimed a spell towards Harry, but Harry ducked that. "Those who foolishly align themselves with both you and still fight under the banner of Albus Dumbledore even though I had him killed will suffer soon enough."

"Get new material Riddle, the old stuff is beginning to get a bit boring," responded Harry, as he aimed to impale a conjured metal spike into the head of Voldemort but his deadly enemy blasted it into dust. Harry signaled for his people to block off this floor, so he could make Voldemort think twice about his plans at his own leisure.

"AVADA KEDAVRA!" shouted Voldemort, but a piece of debris was levitated in its path, blocking the killing curse.

"Last time you tried that, you were kicked out of your body for thirteen years, so it was a good thing that I blocked it, you should really be thanking me on bending knee," said Harry but he had to dodge some deadly silvery lights. "Okay, maybe no thanks today I guess."

"Crucio," said Voldemort, but Harry had been under that curse enough times to know that he was not going to let that one connect and he avoided it by throwing a piece of furniture its path. It burst into flames and Harry realized that might have been his nerve endings had it been allowed to connect. "You can't keep this up forever, Potter, there is no way you can defeat me."

"I'm closer than you ever would imagine, Riddle," muttered Harry, blocking another round of spells. Six of the seven Horcruxes had been dealt with, all Harry had to do now was track down that snake, Voldemort's familiar Nagini. The problem was Voldemort obviously kept the snake rather close to him, obviously paranoid. He would become even more paranoid if he ever realized that his Horcruxes

had been taken, but there had been no hint and Harry decided not to enlighten him. Harry blocked black fire, just managing to freeze it. Ice crashed to the ground, shattering into pieces. The two powerful wizards continued to duel, as they sent spells at each other. They ricocheted off of each other, causing massive shockwaves to shake the Ministry of Magic. The duel continued, with both sides not giving up, throwing spells but refusing to allow their opponent gain any sort of advantage.

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Alastor Moody had mostly recovered from the battle of Hogwarts, with a bit more scars and a bit more skin missing. He was not as young as he used to be and he had tried to impart his knowledge on the next generation of Aurors but very few of them were willing to work hard to learn. In fact, he could name off hand those who had really decided to benefit from his teachings. Scrimgeour was obviously a great Auror, someone who had come to Moody on occasion for advice, although not nearly as much as he rose in seniority in the Auror rankings. Shackbolt was good as well and Nymphadora Tonks was more skilled than many of her male counterparts, really willing to learn. It was a shame that she got thrown into Azkaban, by a leak that was never found and refused to return to the Auror. Dawlish also appeared to be perfectly acceptable, but the problem was that he was a Ministry bootlicker and refused to think too far outside the box.

He held together the Order of the Phoenix after Dumbledore's death, but it was just a collection of unqualified misfits, with a few people that are talented, but would be eaten alive by most of Voldemort's Inner Circle. Loyalty to Dumbledore's memory was the only thing that kept them together and that was a very poor foundation to build upon. Still, Order or no Order, Moody vowed to fight until his very last breath. He had thought about offering Potter a spot as the leader of the Order of the Phoenix, but that would entail revealing to Potter that the Order had not disbanded, only reformed under new leadership and it might taint the memory of Dumbledore in the boy's eyes. Moody might be ruthless when he dueled, but outside of the arena of combat, it was a different story entirely.

“Moody!” shouted one of his contacts in the Ministry of Magic, causing Moody to spin around, nearly hexing him but managing to relax his arm just in time.

“What have I told you about sneaking up on me without warning?” demanded Moody, his magical eye fixed on the contact.

“I’m sorry but Potter’s at the Ministry, fighting Voldemort, the entire building is sealed off, all of the Aurors are being called back, they think they can trap him up there,” responded the contact quickly, looking very anxious.

“It just might work, but Potter is going to have to land the killing blow, let’s get to the Ministry of Magic to make sure everything goes off without a hitch,” remarked Moody, who made arrangements to contact the remaining members of the Order of the Phoenix. It was the moment of truth.

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“Give up Potter!” demanded Voldemort, as the floor of the Ministry of Magic that they were fighting on had been charred. A loud bang created by Harry’s wand had staggered Voldemort back but Voldemort continued to fight back. “You can’t beat me.”

“Not today, but I will eventually,” said Harry and before Voldemort could think of Harry’s words, several conjured razor sharp blades spiraled right towards him, similar to the one’s that removed Snape’s hand. Voldemort blasted them to liquid metal, being just a bit quicker than Snape. A blast of black light was dodged by Harry, before Harry spun his wand. Black fire spiraled towards Voldemort but Voldemort dodged that attack, incinerating the door behind them. Harry threw a sonic vibration spell at Voldemort but Voldemort quickly disabled the loud sounds.

“I’ve learned that trick by now Potter,” said Voldemort as he sent another attack, but they were deflected back, forcing the Dark Lord to adjust his positioning.

“Good, perhaps you’re not completely hopeless, Riddle,” responded Harry as he sent thick metal ropes towards Voldemort. This spell was just to give up something to deflect, to allow Harry to maneuver around, as he heard the sounds of many Aurors and other Ministry officials arriving. “Sorry, to cut this dance a little bit short, but I’ve got business to attend to.”

“You won’t be leaving alive Potter,” said Voldemort defiantly but Harry threw the Incendio Bomb that had up his sleeve right towards Voldemort. Voldemort made the mistake of trying to blast it, which caused it to explode, starting a raging inferno on the floor of the Ministry of Magic. Harry used the attempt to disapparate away from the scene. Voldemort coughed, before several jets of water extinguished the flames. He was face to face with hundreds of Ministry witches and wizards. Voldemort looked at them, if weighing his options. A fifth of the people were his own followers but it was too risky to try anything. “Another time, with Gringotts out your hands, you can’t remain united against me for long.”

Three deadly green lights were sent right towards the crowd of Ministry officials that caused them to put their own defenses up and Voldemort to use a concealed Portkey. The Dark Lord had not acquired this much power without giving up. He would be back, with a new plan to take advantage of the uncertainty gripping the Ministry.

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Harry arrived at the D.A. meeting place, muttering to send a message to the D.A. Leaders.

“I will be joining you in a few minutes, phase one complete, phase two to begin, with the siege of Gringotts,” said Harry.

It would take careful planning and there was so much that could go wrong, but it had to be done.

And that’s Chapter Forty Four. Perhaps the last duel between Harry and Voldemort until their final confrontation, but you just never know. Plans have changed for a couple of things before but most of the main plot points have been set in stone from Chapter One.

Next Chapter, The D.A and friends versus the goblin nation, with the Death Eaters and the Ministry getting involved when they see fit. The Wizarding World may never be the same again.

Chapter Forty Five: Invasion

Voldemort staggered into his fortress, one of those blasted Aurors had hit him in the leg with a bone breaking spell, but most of the cuts and broken bones had to do with Potter. Potter had managed to hold his own against Lord Voldemort again. It was baffling; Voldemort had fought and flattened everyone who opposed him without breaking even the merest sweat. That this boy, who was not even of age yet, managed to match him spell for spell, curse for curse, counter for counter each time. It was almost as if the boy knew how he thought, but Voldemort dismissed that thought immediately as absurd. Next time he fought Potter, the boy would be leaving in a body bag.

Voldemort treated his injuries and was back on his feet. He had hoped that he would be able to seize the Ministry without spilling too much blood. There were some individuals with potential that would allow Voldemort to spread his power abroad. The last wound was healed, along with the last broken bone.

A fight with the Ministry was not what he wanted right now. After Bellatrix's deceit, Voldemort's forces were slightly depleted, even though a few new recruits had joined up recently fresh out of Hogwarts. The problem was they were raw and it would be months before they were ready to do anything of value. Still, they were warm bodies and if they could send a few curses, it would serve Voldemort well once he went for the goblins.

Still, the Ministry would fall into his hands soon. They could not sustain a country for much longer, without Gringotts. People would demand results faster and they did not have the nerve to slaughter the goblins, to force them to open the doors of Gringotts back up. Only Voldemort could do that and soon he would have control of everything. Lord Voldemort would triumph over all and everyone who opposed him would fall.

Including Harry Potter, especially Harry Potter, they would all fall to Voldemort.

“Rope off that corridor, it looks too damaged, the floor might cave in,” barked Scrimgeour in a tense voice, as the damage in the Ministry with the Voldemort and Potter duel had caused. It could have been worse, had they not been blocked off on one floor but it was still damaging. “Get magical maintenance to repair that stairway, get a word out to the workers to use the lift until then, increase the security outside the Minister’s office.”

Scrimgeour took a deep breath, as he looked around. Several people had already holed themselves in their office, just coming out, when it was obvious that Voldemort had vacated the premises. When the Daily Prophet got a hold of the fact that Voldemort just walked into the Ministry, the number of howlers the top ranking officials at the Ministry received. Potter was nowhere to be found, but that was the least of their worries right now. There were loud complaints of many officials downstairs, many threatening to turn in their resignations if the Ministry failed to do something about Voldemort.

To be honest, Scrimgeour was struggling to find a reason to stay himself. His job was getting more difficult, not that it was ever easy, by the day. He had a limited amount Aurors, approximately a hundred and fifty, give or take a few, in the department. A few people would join the department in the fall, but Scrimgeour doubted there would be much of a department to speak of come the fall.

“Make sure to tighten that up, hold your wands, check everyone, and curse them on sight if someone who is not authorized to enter the Minister’s office comes it, I don’t give a damn who it is, we’ll sort it out later,” commanded Scrimgeour, as they nodded, before he pushed his way into the office, where Amelia Bones sat behind her desk, wand in hand, despite the fact that four more Aurors sat, two on either side and one sat right beside the door on either side.

“What’s the news from outside?” asked Amelia in a tired voice, she had been confined to her office, as the Ministry was combed for any Death Eaters or suspicious characters that would be a potential concern. It could take many hours and until then, the Ministry was under lockdown. No one was allowed inside, no one was allowed outside, even those who had recently quit out of protest to Voldemort walking into the Ministry without any resistance whatsoever.

“More of the same, it just gets worse with each passing hour, I can just imagine what it will be like when word gets out and despite our best efforts it will get out,” said Scrimgeour in a somber voice, as if he was attending a wake and he might as well. It would be a long time before the general public would trust anyone in the Ministry of Magic, especially those who worked into the upper reaches. “Our latest attempt to negotiate with the goblins went sour.”

“How bad was it?” asked Amelia, even though she did not want to know.

“Well our envoys were sent to St. Mungos with third degree burns, after they had an unfortunate meeting with dragons, Diagon Alley is in shambles, especially after one of their dragons got loose,” said Scrimgeour. “I’m not sure if that was that much of an accident, but it was contained, after Ollivanders and Flourish and Blotts went up in flames.”

“More good news then, I never expected this to ever happen and I prepared myself for a lot,” answered Amelia. “Goblins closing Gringotts, especially now, it’s just the worst possible time. It’s what he intended naturally, but still...I don’t even know any more. I think this might be the fall of the magical government in this country.”

“Now, Amelia, I think you might be overreacting a bit much,” responded Scrimgeour but Amelia shook her head.

“Not this time, especially not now, the revolving door that is Azkaban despite our best efforts, the Downfall fiasco, The Wizengamot members being revealed to be Death Eaters, and now the past forty eight hours, with Gringotts closing their doors and Voldemort coming to the Ministry without any resistance, this is the end,” said Amelia grimly. “I just hope it will be a crash, instead of a slow descent when it happens.”

“So are you going to give up?” asked Scrimgeour

“Of course not, giving up is the last thing we need now, especially in case I’m wrong about this,” said Amelia.

"It appears Voldemort had left and Potter, I assume he left as well, I don't know what he was thinking deciding to fight Voldemort," said Scrimgeour. "I suppose he had to, as no one could have stood up to Voldemort but..."

"It's a rather sad indictment of the Wizarding World when a sixteen year old, almost seventeen year old wizard, is the only one who could fight the most dangerous dark wizard that this country has to deal with," said Amelia with a slight ironic smile, even though it was very strained. "To be fair, it's not just any sixteen year old wizard."

"Yes, Potter, there might never be another, just like there will be another Dumbledore, another Merlin, another Ravenclaw, Hufflepuff, Slytherin, or Gryffindor, and countless others," said Scrimgeour as he looked towards the Aurors, who listened intently with interest but suddenly straightened up and looked really serious when they realized their boss had saw them. "I don't even want to get into half the rumors they have about him, that he is the so called Chosen One, the only one who could defeat Voldemort."

"He has accomplished a lot in a short amount of time, regardless of what the Daily Prophet says he is or isn't," said Amelia, she decided to take any rumor with a grain of salt. She had seen too much and heard too much to take anything other than what she had personally experienced. That included the rumors about Harry Potter. He had managed to survive several encounters with Voldemort, so there had to be something good about him. He was well connected with the Ministry, but appeared not to abuse the power, rather forging connections so he could pass laws that benefitted the Wizarding World although there was a sense that she got that he wished to do more and quite frankly, sometimes she wished she could as well but her hands were rather tied by Ministry policy. "We should however worry about matters closer at home, even if it might be the end, until that day comes, we must maintain the Ministry of Magic until the day it crumbles to the ground."

"I know," said Scrimgeour, as it was not fun to fight a losing battle, but it was what must be done and he refused to give up until his very last breath had been given out of his body. "The sweep of the Ministry of

Magic should be done by now, hopefully soon, so we can sort this out, the last thing we need is something happening from the inside that diverts our attention away from the matter at hand.”

Amelia nodded somberly, as she looked around. Despite the fact that her office was packed with Aurors and the corridor outside had even more Aurors, she kept her hands firmly on her wand. She would not put it down, even for a second, but that second could cost her much more than the Ministry of Magic.

“Go to that, you are granted access to this office if you need my assistance on any matters,” said Amelia as Rufus Scrimgeour nodded, before he walked out. The world might be crumbling at an accelerated rate but as long as they could manage, they would try to stabilize the Ministry. It was an uphill struggle and an uncertain future was ahead of them.

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The members of the D.A. were crowded around, talking about what they heard. They could scarcely believe that they would be fighting the goblins for control of Gringotts, but they had overheard from their parents of the negative effects that closing Gringotts would have on the magical economy. Over the past couple of days, that much had been proven, and it would only get worse. Diagon Alley was a shell of its former self, looted by people who were both scared and angry.

Still their leaders looked out and sure enough, the main leader, the founder of the Defense Association, Harry Potter arrived. It had appeared that he just fought a difficult battle, his clothes were slightly singed and his hair was even in more disarray. A few eagle eyed members of the D.A. noticed a slight limp that Harry was disguising.

“I just got back from my latest battle with Voldemort, he decided to try and strong arm the Ministry into handing over control over to him but of course, I disagreed with him and we had a nice little duel, where I managed to injure him slightly, not without my share of aches and pains myself,” said Harry, bringing everyone back up to speed. “Voldemort has retreated for now but he will be back. He’ll always come back until he has been put six feet under. There is no two ways

about it. Casting him into spirit form was a one in a million fluke, that will never happen again and I've heard rumors that he has undergone a new set of rituals that will more or less prevent that from happening ever again."

Harry took a deep breath, as they listened intently.

"Voldemort is my concern, all of you will have to keep his Death Eaters off of me, when that time comes, when our final battle happens and I put him down for good but it is a bit coming yet, rather we have more pressing business to attend to," said Harry as he looked at his army, before he turned to Ginny, Luna, Susan, Daphne, and Neville, who all wore varying states of anxiousness on their face. "First of all, to answer your question, there is a good chance that I might be completely and utterly out of my mind trying to overthrow the goblins and take Gringotts by force."

Several people laughed, but it quickly died down.

"There does come a time where we have to do what is necessary no matter how hard it is and the time has come, the Wizarding World has lived and has died based on the whims of the goblins, several magical civilizations have completely died out, once great, now just an uncomfortable reminder of mistakes that continue to be made again and again," said Harry. "The magical government in the United States of America for example, once showed great promise, is now a complete joke thanks to the Goblin Rebellion of 1929. The Muggle government has recovered but the magical one never did and there is only just a sub-department in the United States government that helps cover up magical incidents and disasters, not there is much to speak of with most of the magical people fleeing the country once they get the chance. The Roman Magical Empire, another great magical civilization, brought to its knees. I could go on and on, but the fact remains unless the goblins are put in their place, the Ministry of Magic will be the latest government to crumble based on a goblin rebellion, but right now as they speak, they are on the verge of collapsing, with Voldemort being able to walk into the Ministry at will, this might have been the straw that broke the Hippogriff's back."

Harry drew in a breath.

"The point I'm trying to make is this must be done, but it won't be easy, far from it, the goblins were caught off guard by Voldemort and to be honest, the goblins he attacked were bankers," continued Harry. "Tougher than your average human, but Voldemort is far from your average human. Now, they have goblin warriors, fierce, blood thirsty, willing to have a hundred of theirs killed just to kill one human, they will keep coming to the very last goblin."

"Don't forget the dragons," remarked Daphne dryly.

"We haven't, believe me," added Ginny with a strained smile, as she looked at Harry. That would be the most difficult security measure of the goblins to overcome.

"They are rather unforgettable," said Luna.

"Dragons are a problem, agreed," responded Harry as he looked at them all, turning to his leaders briefly. "A problem that needs to be solved, because if we can take care of the dragons or at least block them off from the control of the goblins, our chances would improve greatly. This is a battle like we have trained for, not exactly the battle we did train for, as goblins were far on the list of things that needed to be taken care of but always in the back of my mind, I knew I would have to get to them someday."

"Harry has a good point, if we all work together as well as we had when we fought the Death Eaters the past two times, we may be able to do this," added Neville in a confident voice, as he looked at the D.A.

"There is no may about it Neville, we have to do this," responded Ginny firmly.

"And we will," interjected Susan.

"Because knowing Harry, he has a plan that will achieve victory once again," said Luna.

"Right thanks Luna, I do have a plan, utterly simplistic yes, but most plans have to be, but we are not alone in this, we have several

people who will join us for a variety of reasons, but they are on our side and will help us bring Gringotts under our control,” said Harry, as he turned to Ginny, who held the Elder Wand significantly. It was time to test the limitations of that tool to the fullest extent. “We all storm the bank simultaneously, throwing everything and I mean everything we have, we work together, finding a way to incapacitate the dragons, deactivating any defenses, and striking down the goblin warriors. We will force our way inside the bank, where even more goblin warriors and perils are waiting. Getting inside will be the easy part, if you can call it that. Taking control of the bank will be the mountain that we have to climb.”

“This is it, do or die, then?” asked Daphne. “What you’ve been talking about, this is the beginning of the changes that need to take place.”

“Yes, it begins today, one way or another,” responded Harry as he looked from the D.A. Leaders to the members of the D.A, as they all nodded. “Voldemort set the ball rolling a few months sooner than he liked and the goblins punted that ball, causing it to gain speed with each passing minute. They want to try and cripple us in a power play, just because of what one wizard did. Not today, not ever again, we are in control of the center of the Wizarding World and we have to steer it properly from this day forward.”

“We revolutionized Hogwarts in two short years, now its time to take that next step forward,” continued Ginny. “Gringotts will be seized or we will fall. There is a possibility that by some miracle someone else may pick up the pieces but the chances are slim to none.”

“The time for talking is done, its time for action, and time for us to take what is rightfully ours from the goblins, to show them that they can’t dictate our lives any longer,” responded Harry as the D.A. cheered. “I had our battle robes brought in, modified, given improvements based on an experiment I ran over the past year. There is no need for anyone to know who we until the time is right. Now the robes won’t make you invincible, but they should protect you from a great deal of damage. I’m confident that your abilities will do the rest. So get ready and we’ll depart for Gringotts in a half of an hour.”

The D.A. scrambled to get ready for the most important task of their existence and Harry and Ginny left, with a concealed Lily following behind them. They had some matters to discuss and people to contact before the invasion of Gringotts begun.

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"They look motivated and what I've seen through your eyes, they are ready to do this," said Lily as she looked at Harry and Ginny. "Most importantly you're ready. If Voldemort can slaughter a couple dozen goblins, you should have too many problems getting inside."

"Of course, the real fun awaits inside, once we are in, the goblins are going to do everything in their power to make sure that we don't get out alive," said Ginny.

"That is where our skills come in, we don't do this because it's easy and I'm sure to an outside observer, it would seem like everything that I accomplished was with ease," said Harry. "Far from it, took careful planning, manipulation, and cutting down dangerous influences, but today it will pay off."

"Quite literally," responded Lily as she pulled up the hood on her robe, that concealed her face. She could blend in with the D.A. members and no one would be the wiser. "Everyone's contacted, right?"

"Yes, they will all storm the bank on my signal, after we knock out the outer defenses," said Harry. "We need the most help on the inside."

"So are you ready?" asked Ginny.

"I'm always ready, Harry," said Harry, as they clasped hands, the Elder Wand between their hands. "Our greatest victory comes today, what was meant to be the fall of the human world, will be the fall of the goblin nation."

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The goblin warriors sneered as they looked at Diagon Alley, the humans looting the shops had slowed down within the last hour, but it

just proved their point. Humans were filthy creatures who could not be trusted with money. They only fit to abuse it and throughout the years, the goblins felt they were doing them a service by tending to the gold in the bank and allowing humans to use it. Now, they had allowed Lord Voldemort to rise to power and he had ruthlessly slaughtered their brothers. All humans were barbarians, foolish and common, disgusting and weak, and not fit to even be in the same room as the goblins.

They even tried to storm their bank not long ago, but the protections around the bank bounced them back, causing them to crash down to the ground. They never even thought this through; it was just an act of human rage. Still, the goblins sent out a warning signal, by releasing one of their dragons to go into Diagon Alley on the rampage. The implications were clear, to even the most foolish human. Stay away from the bank or they will release all of them into Muggle London. The Ministry would have their share of headaches, especially after the rumors they heard about Voldemort entering the Ministry without any resistance today.

Several loud pops echoed throughout the Diagon Alley, causing the main goblin guards to straighten up, looking as several lights flew from every direction. They waited for the wards to react, but they were bombarded, causing them to crumble.

"First line of defenses have been eliminated!" shouted one of the goblins frantically. "Activate second line of defenses..."

"Deactivate second line of defenses," countered Harry and the D.A. bombarded the second defensive barrier, before it could be completely put in. Several holes punched down the defensive barrier, causing it to crumble into nothingness.

"Third..." stated one of the goblin warriors but he was struck down. He screamed as his heart began beating at an irregular rate, as the figures stepped forward, hoods pulled over their head, but the goblin warriors moved in, with armor on, along with swords and spears.

"This is your only warning humans, clear out of our bank and we won't kill you," said one of the goblins, as he held his sword that had

dried up blood clinging to it. Several of the goblins brandished their weapons threateningly, but the Defense Association Army stood firm.

“We have a counter offer for you, clear out of our bank and we won’t have to wipe out each and every one of you,” said Lily, as several members of the D.A. looked at her, taken off guard by this bold member, who appeared to be a new recruit, because her voice was unfamiliar. The goblins clenched their weapons, with ugly looks on their face, but before they could respond, several spells were shot towards them. Their armor was punctured, but the goblins refused to give in. They threw their weapons, their magic warping them into dangerous balls of fire.

“Everyone, freezing spells, just like we practiced!” shouted Susan, as Harry, Ginny, and Luna moved to the side with one half of the army, with Susan, Neville, and Daphne leading to the other half of the army. The fire created weapons were frozen and smashed to the ground. Several goblins dropped to the ground, but others continued to the fight. It was due to some strange combination of luck and skill, along with the advanced charms put on the robes, that none of the D.A. members were struck down a few minutes into this battle.

The battle continued, with several of the sword swipes coming rather close, the magically enchanted blades cutting the fabric of the robes slightly on a couple of occasions. Lily spotted this, before deciding to use another charm of her own invention. She took careful aim, sending a charm the weapons of a group of goblins. Suddenly, they were twenty times heavier. The goblins struggled, some dropping the weapons but a couple staggered backwards, impaling themselves in the chest. Blood spurted from the chest of the goblin, but Harry and Ginny stepped over him, watching the other half of their army being discomfited from the attacks. Suddenly, an idea formed in Harry’s head.

“Point the Resurrection Stone, as I point the Elder Wand at that spot right now,” muttered Harry and Ginny nodded, before they pointed the two hollows right at a spot of the ground, where the goblins had backed off the D.A. members. One of them winced, a cut on their forearm from the enchanted blade that would have to heal naturally. Suddenly, Devil’s Snare burst from the ground, wrapping around the

goblins. The warriors were caught off guard, the vines wrapping around them. Their weapons were summoned, so they could not transfigure them into fire to get out. The Devil's Snare constricted around the goblins, crushing them in their own armor, it was like being trapped in a tin can.

"Release the dragons," breathed one of the goblins with his last breath and a loud roar was heard by all seconds later. One of the most dangerous threats and security measures for Gringotts had been released.

"Everyone brace yourself, this is where our teamwork and practice will be tested big time," said Harry as the D.A. braced themselves, as three, then four, then five pairs of sickly yellow eyes greeted them and sparks of fire hit the ground. This was going to be a fight but the Defense Association Army was ready for anything and knowing the goblins, they would throw everything at them.

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Scrimgeour walked, having finished the sweep in the Ministry. There were several people who were suspected of being involved with Death Eater activity, but until the Ministry had more concrete evidence, there was much that could be done. Scrimgeour resolved to keep an eye on these figures but as the Ministry opened its doors back up, approximately sixty seconds later, Dawlish, who had been posted in Diagon Alley, to keep an eye on the Gringotts situation and the looting rushed down the hallway, nearly tripped over his feet. Scrimgeour looked as Dawlish straightened up to face him.

"Rufus, you won't believe this, Gringotts...someone is attacking the bank," said Dawlish in a hushed, yet somehow excited voice. Scrimgeour straightened up.

"What are the casualties?" asked Scrimgeour gruffly.

"Goblins were killed, crushed, impaled, strangled," breathed Dawlish. "Maybe the Ministry can get into the bank now, whoever these people are...perhaps we should form an alliance with them..."

“No, Dawlish, it could be a Voldemort plot of some sort, but keeping a closer eye on the bank and getting in if we’re able to does some promising,” said Scrimgeour in a business like voice. “I will round up any free Aurors I can manage and sent you to the bank, to get a closer look and interject if this is the work of Lord Voldemort. Report to me back straight away if you learn anything, anything at all, about who is behind the attack of the bank. Something about this appears off and I want to find out what. Is that clear?”

“Absolutely Rufus, you can count on me,” said Dawlish, who waited as Scrimgeour made his way to make the necessary precautions to contact them.

A shadowed figure walked down the hallway, he had a contact to make of his own.

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“Our time to take control of what is rightfully ours has come, my followers,” hissed Voldemort in a cold voice, as he looked at the assembled Death Eaters, dozens of them, along with the remaining Dementors, the number sliced in half by Downfall but still some remained. “My contacts within the Ministry of Magic have informed me that a great deal of the Aurors will be drawn away for a disturbance in Diagon Alley. This is the perfect time to take the Ministry of Magic. Today Bones and Scrimgeour have denied the Ministry, despite my generous offer to take back Gringotts. My generosity has ran out and we will take the Ministry. Our agents are on the inside, the disgruntled voices who are not thrilled about the management of Amelia Bones, how she has dragged this country down, making it a safe haven for blood traitors and Mudbloods the world over. The Ministry belongs to us and we will take it.”

The Death Eaters cheered, all of them looking rather thrilled. Voldemort gave a smirk, his slit like red eyes glowing with malice. Nagini slithered on his side, looking rather thrilled with her master’s will and looked at the fools he had to put up with on a daily basis.

“Once we have the resources of the Ministry, we will take Gringotts and enslave the goblins,” responded Voldemort in a crisp,

emotionless tone of voice before he turned to Nagini. "Nagini, keep an eye on Gringotts, once I have the Ministry, I will summon you and you will report everything back to me, about the security measures."

"Yes, my Lord," hissed Nagini and Voldemort nodded. He could afford to put Nagini in a dangerous situation, but he was confident in his familiar's abilities to survive in a harsh world. Still, he had other Horcruxes, despite Lucius's bumbling from the diary. The ring, the cup, the diadem, and the locket were all safe and no one could kill him, even if Nagini somehow perished. Voldemort turned to his followers. "In five minutes, I will send a signal to my agents on the inside and we will bombard the Ministry of Magic."

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One of the dragons breathed fire. There were five beasts in all and no doubt more on the inside, still guarding the vaults, but the D.A. spread up into five separate teams, one for each dragon, as the remaining goblin warriors slipped inside the bank, to watch as the humans got barbecued or so they would think.

"Aim for the eyes, all at once or try for stunning spells, after they're softened up," responded Harry one of the dragons hovered in the air, it was obvious the dragon was not interested in defending Gringotts, but rather to cause mayhem elsewhere, as she began to fly in the direction of Muggle London. "And don't let them escape into Muggle London! We'll go after this one."

Ginny, Harry, Luna, Lily, and a few others had pointed wands towards a window, summoning broomsticks from the nearby shop, before they all mounted them and lifted off, zooming after the large dragon, as the other four dragons battled with the remaining D.A. members. One of the dragons was caught right in the eyes with eight conjunctivitis curses simultaneously and the beast went on a rampage. The other three dragons refused to go down without a fight, as the wounded dragon went on a rampage, smashing up the front of Gringotts, just like it was intended. The reinforced building held up but it was beginning to show signs of strain under the brutal attacks from the dragons.

A set of seven stunning spells hit another of the dragons. The dragon spun around, as more stunning spells bounced off of it and a third round of seven did the trick, dropping the dragon to the ground. The dragon's skin managed to be pierced and he fell to the side, smashing against the side of Gringotts, causing shockwaves to rattle the entire bank.

Dawlish and his army of Aurors arrived at this moment, just in time to be greeted by a breath of fire from a very ticked off dragon.

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Amelia sat in her office, surrounded by the Auror guards. She knew the necessity of being guarded constantly, but it was irritating to try and do paperwork with several pairs of eyes. Scrimgeour's head appeared in the fireplace.

"Minister, Dawlish has just reported a disturbance in Diagon Alley, Gringotts is being attacked by a mysterious party, I'll report back, but I thought you should know about it," said Scrimgeour but before Amelia could digest this piece of news, a loud alarm sounded throughout the Ministry and Amelia winced as she heard that.

"Please, tell me that's not the alarm I think it is," muttered Amelia as she shook her head but it was and several loud bangs echoed from the lower floors, right around the entrance to the Department of Mysteries. Amelia scrambled to get out word of what was happening to the rest of the Ministry. "We have a dark threat alert, repeat a dark threat alert. All departments precede with standard evacuation techniques. This is not a drill, repeat this is not a drill! "

"Amelia, I believe our meeting was cut short and we have some unfinished business to attend to!" shouted Voldemort. "Don't bother to flee, as my contacts have already sealed off all of the exits. Surrender the Ministry or face the wrath of my followers."

"What are we going to do now Minister?" asked one of the Aurors.

“We’re going to fight,” responded Amelia firmly as she held her wand, with the Aurors looking equally determined. “If we fall, we’re taking as many of them with us as we can.”

And that’s Chapter Forty Five. Everything that I wanted to get done in this chapter seemed a lot shorter in my head than on paper, thus it will be split into two chapters. Chapter Forty Six, the struggle for Gringotts continues, with the Ministry Aurors caught in the middle and Voldemort’s hostile takeover of the Ministry of Magic as well. Chaos, destruction, brutality, bloodshed, all sorts of fun and excitement.

My goal is to wrap up this story by the end of the month but you know what they say about the best laid plans. I know where I want to go; it’s just how many chapters it will take that is something that has not been quite hammered out.

See you again after a little while.

Chapter Forty Six: Seizing

Several broomsticks shot through the air, moving after the airborne dragon, as it breathed fire right on the ground. Harry and Ginny maneuvered around the dragon, but it swung its tail. Exactly as they wanted, as they served around. Another serve around and Harry and Ginny had shot behind, where the other flying members of the D.A. were waiting. The dragon turned, she was not having any of this, as she breathed fire right at the D.A. but they scattered to avoid the attack, before all of the wands were aimed. They shot right at the eyes of the dragon. The dragon gave a loud pained roll, flying slightly off balance. The D.A. flew into position, sending more spells at the dragon. None were meant to harm it but rather to drive it away back into Muggle London. The dragon gave a loud roar, before another set of spells hit the eyes. The dragon crashed to the ground and several thick chains shot from the ground. It secured the dragon to the ground. The dragon growled, but several stunning spells struck it, with the dragon put to the ground.

“Let’s get back to the bank, the others look like they could use all the help they can get,” said Harry firmly, as the members of the D.A. followed him. One of the rampaging dragons had smashed open the front doors of the bank and had been subsequently put down to the ground, secured and not getting back up. Two dragons had remained and the D.A. was having trouble being in position long enough to coordinate an attack. The airborne D.A. members shot spells downward, to distract the dragons. The dragons decided to turn their attention to the people in the air, growling and snarling angry.

“Strike them now!” shouted Susan and Daphne issued a similar order to the group she was leading, but several stunning spells had once, struck the dragons right in the back, dropping them to the ground. They crashed down hard and several chains shot from the ground, wrapping around the dragons. The dragons were secured to the ground, as the Defense Association Army turned to the door of Gringotts. A few of them moved forward towards the open door, but Harry shook his head, before he reached forward and picked up a rock. He threw it through the front door and a blast of yellow light blasted quickly through the door, vaporizing the rock into dust.

"The goblins have a few tricks up their sleeve," said Luna.

"Can you deactivate it, Harry?" asked Neville as he turned to Harry who analyzed it for about a moment, before he nodded.

"Might take a bit of time, but I can get them down," said Harry, as he casually put up a barrier behind his back, that caused the Aurors to be unable to pass any longer. They struck the barrier, in an attempt to get through. Each attempt was futile, they could not get through no matter how hard they struck the barrier.

"Let us through, this is the Ministry of Magic!" shouted Dawlish but Harry rolled his eyes, before he turned and began deactivating the protective barrier. Even with the Elder Wand, it would take a bit of time, goblin defenses tended to gain more power when they were tied into the bank but Harry enjoyed a challenge. It was rare that his abilities were truly tested, as there were few people and things that were on his level. There were times where he got bored with how easy things were. However, this looked to be a bit of a challenge. He would defuse it and get inside the bank, where the real fun awaited them.

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The hallways of the Ministry of Magic became cold and uninviting as the Dementors arrived. The group of Aurors staggered backwards. Most of them had just learned the Patronus Charm but had not practiced it in years, thus they lacked definition and shape. Still, an attempt to back the Dementors down beat the alternative.

"EXPECTO PATRONUM!" shouted several of the Aurors and several instinctively clouds of white mist shot from their wands, right towards the Dementors. The Dementors moved forward, pausing for a brief second, before they pushed the clouds of mists out of the way and continued to move forward. Another round of poor Patroni were sent out and once again, the Dementors casually brushed them to the side as if they were less than nothing. The sinister creatures moved forward, their cold breath nearly the Aurors, who thought it would be the best time to make a retreat. The hoods of the Dementors were lowered one by one, as the faceless Dementors turned, but a large

gaping opening, almost like a black hole, was revealed. Something that could be crudely referred to as a mouth by the loosest definitions and the Aurors were too paralyzed to move. These mouths were sucking every happy thought, every emotion, causing the air to be colder and colder, as a feeling of apathy grew. The Dementors grabbed the Aurors by their shoulders one by one, leaning forward. They gave a futile struggle, before the Dementors forced themselves on the Aurors, their mouths pressed against the miniature black holes on the Dementors' faceless heads. They felt a small stabbing pain as their souls were ripped from their bodies and then they felt no more.

The Dementors let go of their victims, dropping them to the ground. Their skin was pale and their eyes were blank, there was no use for them, they were to be discarded like trash. They felt stronger, the Dark Lord had assured them that the great light that threatened them had perished and they had been coaxed out of hiding because of fresh meat. They glided down the hallway, to continue their journey, thrilled with the sounds of pain and despair as the people that once used them had fell to the Dark Lord and his followers. All humans would fall, despite this Downfall's best efforts to destroy the Dementors. Even the Dark Lord could not stand up to them in the end.

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Amelia moved down the corridor, watching a couple of Death Eaters drop to the ground, even though they would be quickly revived by their associates. They had been working hard to force open an exit, to evacuate anyone they could, but whatever Voldemort did to it, it was not going to be easy to open up the Ministry. The incident at Gringotts was forgotten as quite frankly, they had their own pressing problems right now. She sent a stunning spell, knocking one of the Death Eaters over the banister and down a flight of stairs. Where he went from there and what happened to him, it would be something they should sort out.

"No!" shouted a pained voice but Amelia blocked it out of her mind, as Scrimgeour was battling a Death Eater nearby. Several people ran down the hallways, fleeing for their lives, but were stopped by a group of Death Eaters, who pointed their wands at them, forcing them back into the hallway. Amelia made a movement to walk forward but she

was face to face with a particularly vicious Death Eater, who sent a skin shredding curse towards the Minister of Magic. It was a miracle that her shield had just blocked it. Another block, before she blasted the Death Eater backwards. There was barely enough time to catch her breath, as more Death Eaters and it was hard to see who was helping the battle on the Ministry's side, who was helping the Death Eaters, and who was just scared for their lives.

Rufus Scrimgeour gritted his teeth, as he blasted one of his opponents backwards. Several of his Aurors laid on the hallway, in various states of injury, some killed but a few others still managed to keep the fight off. All their training and all their preparation had not prepared them for this.

"Keep fighting, don't let up, no matter what!" shouted Scrimgeour in what he hoped was an encouraging tone.

"We're losing, what's the point," said one of the Aurors in a discouraging voice, but was blasted right in the back. The curse busted the spine of the dark wizard catcher, as the foul face of Rodolphus Lestrange turned to face Scrimgeour. He was one of Lord Voldemort's most dangerous followers and he sent a vicious black light at Scrimgeour, who deflected the attack. There were the sounds of people being struck down, screams and pained grunts from below and above them, and Rufus looked up uncertainly, as the ceiling was crumbling above them. The Ministry of Magic building was not built for this kind of stress, of magic flowing through the air like this.

"You might want to heed your Aurors, warnings, Scrimgeour," said Rodolphus in a nasty voice as a bright orange light was dodged by Scrimgeour and it hit one of Rodolphus's fellow Death Eaters. The man's skin blistered before the blisters exploded into an acidic pus, consuming the man. Rodolphus was unconcerned as he continued to battle with Scrimgeour, as several spells flew dangerously in the air, dangerously close to connecting with the participants as the chaos in the Ministry of Magic continued and mist rose up the stairs on that level.

"Brace yourselves!" shouted Amelia as the Dementors were coming and judging by the shrieks of terror, several people have already

gotten a little kiss today but before she had much time to brace herself, a green light flew to her. It was only an act of faith and bad aim on the Death Eater's part that it missed, striking the wall behind her instead.

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Harry had finally deactivated the barrier around the door and after a quick check of any other nasty surprises, like the floor caving in or turning to quicksand when they entered the bank but found nothing. So the D.A. Leaders turned, sending a signal for their allies on the outside to join them. The Aurors were still trapped by the barrier and Dawlish looked very annoyed, but the D.A. members stepped inside the bank, followed by several loud pops outside the bank and several more people entered the building, before the doors sealed shut once the last figure passed the doors.

Suddenly, the barrier dropped and Dawlish turned to his Aurors, before they moved forward, wands held.

"Bust down the doors, we'll see what this is all about," said Dawlish in a defiant voice, who was very annoyed being stopped in his tracks just moments ago. The Aurors turned and attempted to force down the doors, with every attack they could manage, but the doors remained shut, it would take a very powerful attack to force them open.

Little did the Aurors or the D.A. know that a certain snake had slithered inside the bank as well, to keep an eye on the activities within at a safe distance for her master, just before the doors sealed themselves shut.

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The Defense Association Army and their allies walked inside the empty lobby of the bank. They stopped, it was a bit of a shock to be greeted by absolutely nothing.

"There's no one there," said Susan in a surprised voice. "Or no one we can see rather."

"I don't like this," added Daphne as she looked around from side to side, as they expected hordes of goblins.

"It's quiet, too quiet," said Ginny but Luna just turned to her with a bemused look on her face.

"That's just inviting something bad to happen, Ginny," said Luna but Harry held up his head. It was very faint, but he could feel vibrations beneath his feet.

"Wands out and be ready, because the goblins have something up their sleeves and be ready to move at a second's notice," said Harry and everyone had their wands out, before loud thumps were heard from beneath them. The thumps got louder, as they stood, and several walking corpses entered the lobby, their pale rotting skin giving off a putrid smell.

"Inferi," stated Luna.

"Unfortunately yes," added Neville, as he looked at them, they advanced on them, holding out their hands.

"Now we know what happened to all the people who tried to steal something from Gringotts and all the Ministry officials who tried to tell the goblins what to do," remarked Harry, as his eyes rested on a very familiar face. "Hello, Lucius, long time no see."

It was amazing how the goblins had managed to piece together most of the corpse of Lucius Malfoy and use him as a defense for the bank. Lucius just responded with an inhumane snarl.

"Incendio Bombs, please," said Harry to Fred and George, who nodded, as several fire spells backed off the Inferi, before they passed around the new and improved versions of the Incendio Bomb. Each of the members of the D.A. had a bomb in their hand and they tapped their wand to them. The bombs lit up, with an orange glow and they were quickly thrown. They hit the ground and the Inferi backed off, sensing the fire, but they spontaneously combusted, the flames catching the Inferi. They gave what could only be called a

scream, as the flames continued to consume them, as they were reduced into ashes, which fluttered to the ground and the fire put themselves out, only dealing with its intended target.

"I must say I'm impressed with the new and improved models," remarked George.

"Indeed, the old ones did have some defects, no matter how well they worked," added Fred in an approving tone of voice, thrilled to have worked out all of the defects in one of their weapons.

"You both did well in your work and sure you have some other tricks that will help us, but we have to get moving," said Harry.

"Yes, the goblins will have something else up their sleeve," commented Luna. "They aren't going to give this up without a fight but I don't think we will either."

"Right Luna, we've gone too far to give up now," responded Ginny and it appeared they had agreed. They broke into the bank, when the Ministry had failed to do so, and the Aurors were on the outside, trying to get inside the bank, but unless Harry or Ginny deactivated the spells, it would take a magical explosion that could level most of London just to pry them open.

"We will win in the end," said Harry, as the D.A. Members stepped forward, but more footsteps were heard, as an army of goblin warriors arrived, basically outnumbering the D.A and their allies, three to one and maybe four to one. It was difficult to determine with these many goblins, but the fact they were more than slightly outnumbered was obvious.

"We doubt that very much human," responded a goblin in rough tone of voice, as the they stepped forward, intense looks on their faces and magically enhanced weaponry in hands, along with enhanced armor. As determined as the Defense Association Army was to take control of Gringotts, it appeared the goblins would be damned if they lost it to a bunch of humans, especially when the majority of them were just barely of age or had not even become of age as of yet.

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Scrimgeour sent one of the Death Eaters he fought backwards, a group of Aurors had somehow blocked off the stairs, causing several Patroni to overlap, forming a shield but he knew it would not hold for long. He had made a split decision to authorize lethal force and he would deal with any heat that he would catch over it later. A curse struck the Death Eater right in the throat, slicing it. The wizard dropped to the ground, blood splattering as Scrimgeour continued to fight.

“What’s the story by the stairs?” demanded Scrimgeour in a loud voice, as he put up a shield to avoid the attacks.

“The Dementors have went around the other direction, they might be trying the lift!” shouted a female Auror, as she dodged an attack, but that was the last thing she did as a Killing Curse struck her in the back. She was thrown down the stairs from the impact, crashing right on the back of her head, her neck snapping. Not that it mattered as she was already dead. Scrimgeour stepped in a puddle of blood and knocked the Death Eater back. Rodolphus Lestrage had rejoined the fight, after being temporarily inconvenienced a nasty gash on the side of his head, as he continued to strike down Death Eaters and Ministry employees, who had been unfortunate enough to be trapped on the floor.

“Try and take care of that lift if you can get there!” shouted Scrimgeour as a group of Aurors closest, nodded, sending a couple of spells behind them to give them some cover, before they moved. The battle continued, as many thought it was odd that no one had seen Lord Voldemort’s face yet but it was assumed that he might be biding his time. He had a tendency to let his followers do his dirty work.

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The goblins rushed forward, teeth gritted and weapons drawn, but several spells flew through the air. Some were deflected and dodged, or blocked with the armor, but others managed to do their damage. Two vicious warriors charged Harry but Harry jabbed his regular

wand at the ground, causing the ground to shuck and launch the goblins up into the air, the impact weakening their armor. Ginny struck them out of the air. The armor exploded in the impact, before Luna, Neville, and Daphne moved from behind, blasting them in the back. They dropped to the ground, paralyzed, the vital functions in their body in danger of shutting down unless the counter curse was applied shortly and no one in the D.A. was to apply it.

Lily, her hood remaining up and her identity concealed, helped a group of D.A. members keep several goblin warriors at bay, with a mixture of inventive charm work and dark arts spells. She felt thrilled to be able to fight without any restrictions, as when she had to deal with Death Eaters, she had to be careful what she said around any members of the Order of the Phoenix. Now she could fight and the goblins took no prisoners, so she felt no hesitation in throwing the most deadly spells she could think of at them. Harry and Ginny had managed to blow through several goblins, destroying their armor, and allowing Neville, Luna, Daphne, and Susan to finish them off with a second barrage of spells. The goblins just kept coming, but the D.A. was showing no prisoners and neither were their allies.

Fred and George threw two capsules a piece at the ground. The goblins laughed at them but the capsules expanded at an accelerated rate. It had left them in a miniaturized version of their portable swamp and their feet stuck to the ground. They tried to hack themselves free with their weapons but they stuck to the ground.

"The only problem with this is it takes a lot of money to make and it could trip up allies as well with enemies," muttered George in Harry's ear, who nodded, as one group of D.A. members removed the armor with a barrage of spells from the trapped goblins, while a second group had sent spells. The blood of the goblins mixed with the muck and the slime of the portable swamp.

"But damned if it did not work well," said Fred, as he moved over, knocking one of the goblins off balance, causing him to be in perfect position to have his armor ripped off by another attack of spells. Harry smiled underneath his hood, two years of team work exercises had paid off in spades, but the goblin warriors. They just kept coming.

“Is every goblin in the world here?” asked Daphne.

“I’m afraid it’s beginning to look like that,” remarked Astoria, as she looked at her sister, before helping her help a trio of D.A. members take out a particularly vicious goblin, who would not go down and had in fact wounded one of their fellow D.A. members. It could have worse, as Astoria gingerly stepped over the body of decapitated goblin, before she sent a blast of blue light right into the eyes of a nearby goblin warrior. The goblin fell to the ground, hands on his head, as if he was suffering a brain aneurysm and for all intents and purposes, he was. It was a spell intended to stimulate the nervous system after prolonged effects to the Cruciatus Curse, but used on a completely healthy person or goblin, it could have potentially fatal effects.

There was no time for rest, as more goblins kept coming but the D.A. and their allies kept fighting. They refused to lose, they would never stop fighting. More spells reigned down, some avoided, some hitting dead on, as everyone had to avoid being stabbed by the goblin’s enchanted weapons.

“On three, hit that ceiling with a Reducto with the Elder Wand,” muttered Harry to Ginny, who nodded, as they both held the Elder Wand in their hand, to give it a little extra power. The shared power with the Elder Wand had already increased what would be a potent and powerful attack, by blasting the ceiling. The ceiling crumbled, before it landed right on a group of goblin warriors either crushing them or severely injuring them. This allowed a group of six members of the D.A. to move around and finish off the remaining goblins, blasting them once again with high impact spells that busted their armor, before they punctured their skin with the magical equivalent of a hundred razor sharp needles. The goblins dropped down, bleeding from the deadly punctured wounds.

“They’re weakening,” said Lily to Harry and Ginny as she sent a modified charm at an unprotected goblin. It was a slicing charm but it had the added affect of making it feel like salt was being poured in the victim’s wounds. The goblin gave a pained scream, as he felt unbearable pain as he slowly bled to death. Several goblins aimed their axes but spells had struck them, causing them to be transfigured

into heavy boulders. Despite the fact that the goblins were stronger than their size would indicated, these were even too heavy to lift above their head and thus they collapsed, being crushed. Several Incendio Bombs ensured the job was completed. The broken, battered bodies of the goblins had spontaneously combusted, the flames having consumed them.

"It looks like it's slowing down," said Neville in a relieved voice as the amount of goblin warriors were pouring into the lobby was beginning to decrease. Which was a relief as many of the D.A. members were feeling slightly fatigued and there were some injuries, but no fatalities, as far as Neville can see anyway.

"Keep at it though, we can win if we keep fighting," said Susan.

"Let's hope so," said Daphne but as an orange light struck the goblin she faced off against, eating its skin. The goblin shrieked in agony. A sword glanced off of her shoulder, just cutting it, but a coil echoed and razor wire snaked around the goblin. The goblin tried to hack himself free but just one bit of movement caused the razor wire to slice into him, shredding him into ribbons.

"Well they won't give up yet, I don't think," commented Sirius, as he banished a goblin into the wall. The exact angle had caused the goblin to hit so far that many bones broke, leaving him open for the kill. "Then again neither will we."

"The goblins won't let us by now, I don't think," said Remus, as he managed to avoid the attacks of two of the goblins, who had turned their weapons into a flaming variety and they clashed together.

"Keep at the humans, rip them apart for what they did to our fellow goblins, spill their filthy blood!" shouted one of the goblin warriors, a nasty gash on his cheek.

"No, I don't think they will," responded Lily but she sent a spell at the boisterous goblin who ducked and an attack was thrown at her but she blocked it. They would fight to the very last goblin, they had a never surrender mentality, especially when it was to humans.

Still despite a few injuries, some of them a bit pressing, the D.A. refused to give up. It would be foolish to stop right now.

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"Keep attacking it we've got to get inside, those could be Death Eaters and if they take control of the bank, all is lost!" shouted Dawlish in a loud voice as he stood back, watching the Aurors bombard the door with every type of spell imaginable. Their timing was off and maybe if they could all put in synchronized attacks, they might have had a little more success. "Keep pounding it, don't give up, if you drop from exhaustion, get back up!"

"I doubt even a nuclear bomb would pry this thing open," muttered one of the Aurors.

"A what?" asked Dawlish, who had no idea what this nuclear thing one of his Aurors was babbling on about. Suddenly a message appeared and a very pained Scrimgeour appeared right in front of him. His bloodied face looked at Dawlish, it looked like he had been through a hell of a battle, his face almost reduced to raw hamburger.

"Dawlish...get back to the Ministry...right now..." gasped Scrimgeour.

"Rufus, we can't, we're so close to finding out what's going on inside Gringotts," said Dawlish as several Aurors paused to roll their eyes. They were no closer to breaking inside the bank then they were to discovering self spelling wands.

"Now...Dawlish...Voldemort's here...our forces are dwindling...we need help..." said Scrimgeour but a green light struck Scrimgeour right in the back and his face was replaced by that of Lord Voldemort who looked at them with red slit eyes, before he laughed maliciously.

"I would stay in Diagon Alley if I were you, Dawlish, anyone who attempts to enter the Ministry without my permission will be annihilated as you will be considered to oppose Lord Voldemort," said Voldemort as if he was taunting and Dawlish turned to the Aurors, but Voldemort was gone.

“Scrimgeour has been struck down, we need to help, who knows what’s going on there,” said Dawlish and several of the Aurors nodded, but they wondered if they would be walking right into their own demise. Still they all disappeared to do what they can to keep the Ministry of Magic out of the clutches of Lord Voldemort, and hope that they could stop him before he had seized complete control of the Ministry.

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While the Defense Association Army at Gringotts was gaining ground, The Ministry of Magic was losing ground, especially when Voldemort entered the fight after most of the Aurors and other Ministry defenders had been softened up.

Voldemort walked down the hallway, stepping over the fallen, deflated body of Rufus Scrimgeour. He spotted Amelia Bones on the other end of the hallway, joining a group of Aurors in battling some of his most dangerous Death Eaters. He stepped forward as a young Auror’s eyes widened before he raised his wand.

“STUPEFY!” shouted the Auror but the spell had just bounced off of Voldemort, not even affecting him.

“Please, don’t insult my intelligence,” hissed Voldemort and another pair of spells. It amused Voldemort that these people tried to uphold Ministry regulations when their lives were in danger. It would be almost amusing if it was not so pathetic. Another spell and Voldemort decided he was bored with this Auror. “AVADA KEDAVRA!”

The Auror stood in front of Voldemort, like a deer in the headlights, an expression that was more amusing when Voldemort had recalled his murder of James Potter, but it applied here. The Auror was struck with a green light and dropped down. Two more Aurors rushed forward, each fighting Voldemort with everything they had but their best could not even match Voldemort’s worst. Voldemort plowed through the Aurors with ease, taking them down with two more Killing Curses. Casually, Voldemort stepped over the bodies of the Aurors, he was cutting them down one by one, leaving his path to the Minister

open and she would scream the loudest once he had gotten his hands on her.

Amelia fought hard but she saw Voldemort gaining momentum, as he cut through the Aurors and other Ministry defenders like a flaming knife through butter. As she managed to disable another Death Eater and watch as one of her Aurors had managed to decapitate one of the Death Eaters, blasting him so hard that the back of his neck struck a sharp metal railing, she thought it would be a good time to check with the Unspeakables to see if they had made any progress in finding a way out, so the remaining members of the Ministry could retreat and reassess their options, because they were being picked off one at a time.

“Anything yet, Croaker,” said Amelia.

“Classified but I believe I may have a way out but it’s slightly messy and if we time this incorrectly, it could prove to be fatal,” said Croaker the Unspeakable.

“What is it?” asked Amelia through gritted teeth, fighting off the Death Eater, as Voldemort continued to pick apart Aurors and other defenders at an alarmingly successful rate.

“The Ministry rubbish disposal unit on the east wing on the fourth floor,” said Croaker and Amelia looked surprised, as she knocked one of the Death Eaters who had attempted to attack her over the banister.

“You’re joking,” responded Amelia in a surprised voice, ducking another vicious and violent attack.

“I don’t joke,” answered Croaker in a tone blank of any emotion, as several of the Aurors backed off.

“The lift is over there, try and block it off, until we can get to it and to the fourth floor, we’re going out to though the rubbish disposal unit,” said Amelia, as this sounded exactly as absurd as it did in her head. While she did not want to retreat, she had no choice. “I know but it’s the only way.”

"You've run out of options I'm afraid," said Voldemort calmly as he walked over, the Aurors stepping behind Amelia slightly, their courage failing them once they came face to face with Voldemort. "Minister Bones, I really wish you would have heeded my offer. You have one final chance, you saw what I did to Scrimgeour, but it can change if you kneel down before Lord Voldemort. Kneel down and I may allow you to live as a prisoner in Azkaban."

"I don't think that will be in my plans for today, Voldemort," responded Amelia firmly, who was more exhausted then she had ever imagined. It had been years since she ever got into a straight up fight with anyone and her body was rebelling against it.

"A pity," said Voldemort in a calm voice, before he sent an organ explosion curse at Amelia, feeling the need to use something a bit less mundane than the normal killing curse. She blocked the attack, before turning around and firing one back at Voldemort. Voldemort easily deflected that one. "A bit more of a fight that I would have imagined, I will give you credit, Amelia for what you're doing, no matter how foolish it is. Most Ministers of Magic would be cowering under their desk by now, waiting for their Aurors to do the job but you decided to join in on the fight, not that it will be enough to defeat me."

"I might not defeat you but someone will eventually," responded Amelia as she sent more spells at Voldemort, eying a rapidly weakening section of cinderblock right above him. It might slow Voldemort if she could drop it on him.

"I'm sure you're stalling me, holding out hope that Potter would make one of his dramatic entrances and save the day again but I've taken steps to make sure he won't stick his nose where it doesn't belong this time, and if he was here, he would have showed up by now, he's not the type to keep someone waiting," said Voldemort as an organ shredding curse was narrowly evaded. "It's a pity that you did not join me, so much pureblood being spilled, such a waste, most of your family perished as well and you will be the latest Bones to die by my wand."

Amelia sent a spell at Voldemort that struck him, causing his heartbeat to speed up momentarily, but Voldemort had managed to stop its effects before it caused a magically educed heart attack.

"The Minister of Magic resorting to dark arts?" asked Voldemort in a mock admonishing voice as he dodged another attack, dark in nature as well. "I wonder what the voting public would say to that, Amelia. That wouldn't be too thrilled about it."

"They'd get over it if you brought you down," said Amelia as she sent a spell over Voldemort's head. It smashed into the cinderblocks and she just barely managed to escape, as a good portion of the ceiling collapsed on Voldemort's head. Amelia turned to the Aurors, who managed to back off the Death Eaters. She dodged around, sending a spell of her own before she motioned to the lift, they moved inside. It was just by luck that the Dementors had been blocked off on another empty floor but it was only temporary. "Everyone that can get to the fourth floor, do so now, rubbish disposal unit, on the east wing!"

The lift moved to that level and the rubble shifted, before it was blasted to dust and Voldemort rose up, casually crushing the crumbled pieces of cinderblock off of his shoulder as if nothing had happened. Voldemort turned to his Death Eaters.

"They went down the lift, to the fourth floor, they have a point of evacuation through the waste disposal unit!" shouted Draco in a voice that sounded like he was thrilled to be of service but Voldemort ignored him and several Death Eaters moved forward, with intentions of stopping the fleeing Minister and the few Aurors that remained, but Voldemort raised a hand to stop him.

"If they wish to run like cowards, then allow them to, we will find them and strike them down later, they may have escaped by this time, providing they have not met any of my other followers," said Voldemort calmly as if this was no concern to him. "They are guilty of treason against Lord Voldemort and will be punished. I have what I need and there are still many in the Ministry who remain that are strongly on our side and as for the others that still remain, they will learn to be or perish."

The Death Eaters that remained cheered at their master's words and they soon prepared to scan the Ministry for any traitors to the Dark Lord and bring it completely under his control, as it should have been.

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The battle at Gringotts raged on, as the goblin warriors dwindled but even if there was only a handful of goblins, they would never stop assaulting the humans they felt were inferior to them in any way. However, even most goblins would have to agree that some of these humans were as dangerous and ruthless as many of the members of the goblin nation. The goblin warriors struggled with countless losses as a task force of over a thousand had been reduced to just less than two hundred.

"The humans will never be allowed to win!" shouted one of the goblins but he was struck down, a metal spike impaling him in the chest. Another pair of goblins were blasted up into the air before they crashed down hard on the back of their necks.

"It's not what you will allow that you should be concerned about," said Ginny.

"But rather what we will do to you," responded Harry as three coils of razor wire were released, that roped around the goblins. The goblins shrieked in agony, as the wire sliced them, shredding their skin, ripping it to pieces. Blood splashed to the ground.

"And we will defeat you," added another voice from the fray as others yelled in encouragement. The never surrender mentality of the goblins increased but Harry had a similar mentality and he had taught it to the majority of his Defense Association Army, as they fought. More goblins were struck down, getting slaughtered by the precision attacks of the D.A. Many members of the D.A. army were slumped against the wall, with slight injuries but they helped when they could.

Only two Aurors and a member of the D.A. had perished, but as the goblins ramped up their attacks, it was obvious they were going to take as many humans down with them as they could in the process.

Lily conjured a net and it wrapped around two goblins. Normally it would no problem, except for the fact there was a time delay charm on the net that turned the net into acid that ate right through the skin of the goblins. She watched as a group of D.A. members moved through, as fatigue began to set in for many of them. This was the longest, most grueling battle of their lives, even their two battles with Death Eaters had not measured up to what they had to endure against the goblins.

“Looks to be about seventy or eighty of them left,” said Luna as she sent a spell that maneuvered a trio of goblins in for the kill. “Under a hundred, maybe just barely a hundred but they’re dwindling.”

“Everyone keep fighting, don’t stop,” encouraged Harry. “Keep it up, you’re doing great.”

“You foolish goblins, you’re weak if you are going to let a bunch of humans roll over us, kill them all, slaughter them like hogs!” ordered what appeared to be the goblin warrior equivalent to a general. The goblin looked at the humans with a scowl, they were filthy, but they dropped several more goblins down, before the remaining goblins fought back. They no longer had the numbers advantage that they thought they would, wearing down their enemies. These humans, whoever they were, were not Ministry puppets or Death Eaters who were only out for themselves, to be Lord Voldemort’s most valued followers. They were something different and a few goblins were wondering if picking this fight was such a good idea.

“You really should surrender, unless you want to become an extinct race of magical creatures,” responded Luna calmly, in an almost pleading voice.

“Doubt they think that would happen, despite the fact the number advantage has swung back in our way, Luna,” responded Neville as he dodged an attack, before he threw a spell that shattered the skull of a particularly vicious goblin, who had killed one of the Aurors.

“Then they will have to pay, I’m afraid,” said Harry in an almost remorseful voice, but there was only so much remorse to be had for a race of creatures that looked down on humans like they were scum

and then decided to take the moral high ground, by claiming that they were victims of human bigotry. One of the goblins attempted to attack Ginny direction, which would turn out to be a huge error in judgment. Ginny blasted the weapon out of his hand and Harry threw him right against the wall. Both of his legs shattered but despite having two broken legs, the goblin still kept coming. Daphne, Astoria, Susan, Fred, and George sent spells at the goblin simultaneously, finally putting the tough warrior down for the count for good.

“You humans will be the ones that will pay for your mass and unprovoked genocide on our kind,” said the goblin general viciously, as he swiped his sword at one of the D.A. members. She screamed, dropping to the ground severely injured and the goblin raised his sword, but was blasted out of the way. A couple dozen of the remaining goblins moved in front of their leader, to take the brunt of spells, as a few D.A. members pulled the injured girl out of the way and did the best they could to heal her.

“Given all the blood you’ve spilled through the years, genocide is something you have no room to talk about,” remarked Daphne, but once again, the goblins decided to take the moral high ground, with something they had no right. The battle ranged on, goblin blood staining the walls of the bank. Many members of the D.A. were battered but few of them were broken.

Fifteen goblins remained; all of them fatigued, except for the vicious goblin leader, the general, who refused to give up.

“Fight them, you disgraceful goblins,” shouted the general. “I refuse to lose to a bunch of filthy, common humans.”

“We should surrender,” said one of the goblins.

“We goblins don’t know the meaning of that word,” said the general scathingly.

“It means to give up fighting, to yield the battle to the opposing side,” responded the goblin which caused the leader to spin around and decapitate the goblin who had dared suggest they give up the battle.

Several of the goblins shouted at each other, which caused the Defense Association Army to pause, watching them in amusement.

“Really, fighting among yourselves?” asked Lily. “That seems very...human of you, doesn’t it?”

“I guess they degraded themselves to our level, because of their failure to defeat us,” added Tonks.

“Guess they weren’t as superior as they thought they were,” inputted Harry and the general and the few goblins that remained turned, enraged at the humans deciding to make a mockery out of their abilities.

“You dare pass judgment on us human!” shouted the general.

“I dare and I have,” remarked Harry, as he held the Elder Wand with Ginny as the Defense Association Army backed off on his signal. As much amusement as he was having with watching goblins bicker with each other, he did want to wrap this up sometime today. A loud blast echoed throughout the lobby and engulfed the remaining goblins in a blinding light. The D.A. and their allies shielded their eyes but when the light cleared, the remaining goblins were down on the ground with the leader secured. He struggled against his bounds but it appeared there was no easy way out.

“You could have done that the entire time, couldn’t you Harry?” asked Daphne.

“Maybe, he could have, it looks like he had this planned,” added Susan, but she was smiling and the other members of the D.A. looked equally amused but Harry and Ginny looked focused and determined as they turned their attention back to the general.

“Actually we could have for the record, but it wouldn’t have been too much of a good idea,” said Ginny. “Unless of course you wanted us to bring all of Gringotts down onto our heads for covering too wide of an area and well...it would have been messy.”

“Yes, Ginny’s right but we have business to attend to,” remarked Harry as he turned to the goblin who kept struggling but was secured. The lead goblin, the general, was giving Harry nasty looks. Basically, if looks could kill, Harry would be six feet under. “With you, you have some information that I want. We can do this the easy way or the hard way. The goblin bankers, the one’s that Voldemort didn’t manage to kill, I know they’re in this bank somewhere. The question is where are those bankers?”

“I believe you humans have an expression that is fitting right now,” said the general in a scathing tone of voice. “I believe it goes something like, you can fuck off. I won’t betray the Gringotts bankers to a group of murderers, that committed mass genocide and wipe out sixty percent of the goblin nation in one fell swoop.”

“Fine, the hard way,” said Harry, who had been hoping for that actually, as he looked into the eyes of the general, forcing his way into the mind of the surly goblin. The goblin fought but that just made it harder on him. Harry tore through his mind with the greatest of ease, lifting the information, both on the whereabouts of the bankers and what he had to deal with regarding the other forty percent of the goblins that had not been slaughtered today. Once Harry was done, the goblin leader fell to the side, cross eyed and drooling, with a catatonic state. A few people took steps forward. “Down by the high security vaults, they’re guarded by dragons, but I believe we have the means to control them now that the goblin warriors have been put down.”

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Ministry officials were horded into the Wizengamot court room by Death Eaters. Voldemort stood above them, like a conquering hero, as his followers held their wands on the group of Ministry officials who looked uncertain at what was going on. Dementors were on the outside of the court room, guarding it from any intruders.

“Today dawns a brand new age for the Ministry of Magic, an age where Lord Voldemort will control, several people here have tried to oppose me but have been struck down, brought to an early, premature death,” responded Voldemort swiftly. “Let it be a lesson to

any of you who might be thinking of playing the hero. No one is immune to the wrath of Lord Voldemort. Dumbledore learned that lesson. The Ministry of Magic learned that lesson and soon Harry Potter and his allies, along with the goblins will learn that lesson rather painfully. You will all be spared as you have not dared oppose me. Others, some of them friends and family of those who stand below me, will not be so lucky. They will all perish should they cross paths with my followers once again. It matters little if your Minister of Magic managed to escape with her life in tact. If she opposes me, she will pay."

Voldemort paused, as if daring anyone to oppose him but naturally no one took the bait.

"Words are cheap, actions can leave a much more lasting impression that leads to obedience," said Voldemort softly as he waved his hand and the images of the group of Aurors lead by Dawlish appeared, mangled nearly beyond all recognition and slaughtered, when they did not heed Voldemort's warnings. They had ran into one of Voldemort's dark magic created wards and had not even bothered to check for it. "The price for disobedience is illustrated for all to see, explanations are not necessary. Now a certain race of magical creatures disobeyed me by spurning my offer of alliance. The goblins wish to control all the gold and thus control the lives of us humans. Naturally, we cannot all this to happen. Mudbloods, half bloods, blood traitors, and even the purebloods will suffer and for once, we must band together for a common cause. We will sort out the matter of blood purity later, right now, the future of humanity hangs in the balance and under my watchful eye, we will regain control of Gringotts from the goblins and put it in more worthy hands. Any who refuse to join in on this noble cause of liberation will be branded as a traitor to humanity"

The Death Eaters cheered and clapped before they turned to the Ministry officials, who joined in, reluctantly and uneasily, but they had no choice. They did not want to be branded as traitors to humanity.

"Let us begin preparations so we can embark on this task soon," remarked Voldemort calmly, who looked forward in having all of the gold in Wizarding Britain under his control and thus controlling the

country that was the center of all magical activity in the world. From here, he could extend his power to other countries until he ruled over every witch and wizard in the world.

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After sending the dragons away, Harry, Ginny, Luna, Daphne, Susan, and Neville walked down the corridors to where the goblins were. The other members of the D.A. and their allies lingered slightly behind, to watch out for any last minute tricks the goblins might have up their sleeves.

"A high security vault, that's intriguing," responded Neville as Harry pointed to where the remaining senior goblin bankers holed themselves up.

"Smart of them, considering humans can't open up these vaults without being sucked into oblivion," added Susan.

"Smart, yes, if we didn't have this," responded Harry, as the Elder Wand was pointed right towards the door of the vault, rewriting the goblin magic from the door, causing it to dissolve into melted metal. A dozen goblins sitting around a round table looked up with their eyes widened, as six humans walked inside and they had a sense there was more outside.

"How did you get inside?" demanded one of the goblins.

"Now come on, you goblins don't give away your secrets, so why should we give away ours," remarked Ginny as she rolled her eyes slightly at the goblin who scowled at her in return but Harry cleared his throat to get their attentions.

"Okay once again, we can do this the easy way or we can do this the hard way," said Harry as Ginny, Luna, Neville, Daphne, and Susan were all heightened, ready for some form of resistance or trick from the goblins. "You goblins sign over the bank to us and vow never to bother us again. Also, I want a hand written apology written to the families of the five humans you slaughtered today, signed in blood by

each of you, for forcing us to come in here because of your bigoted actions towards humans and we let you go off easy.”

“And what if we refuse human?” asked one of the goblins and Harry pointed the Elder Wand towards him, before a black light struck the goblin right in the chest. His skin was inflamed, his organs bursting one by one.

“Something like this, only worse,” commented Luna helpfully.

“So the question is, is there anyone else who wants to try their luck against Harry Potter?” asked Neville and the goblins eyes widened.

“Let me get the papers,” remarked the goblin but as he reached under the table and turned a ward. Several dangerous lights shot from the walls, threatening to slice everything it touched, but the six D.A. Leaders put up an overlapping shield. The defenses bounced off the shield and repelled it back towards the goblins. The goblins were ripped into shreds but their own defenses and Harry pointed the Elder Wand to deactivate it when the last goblin dropped dead.

“Impaled by their own sword, how tragic,” said Daphne in a mock remorseful voice but she did not appear to be remorseful at all. In fact, there was a bit of amusement.

“No, not really,” responded Ginny as she looked at Harry, before they lowered each other’s hoods and kissed passionately. Unless they were mistaken and there were a few rare occasions they were, Gringotts was there’s. They had just remembered that there were other people in the vault and slowly broke apart “We did it Harry. All of us...we won.”

“I could hardly believe it but we now have control of Gringotts, one step closer in building a new empire that will eliminate the mistakes of the past,” responded Harry as he turned to Luna, Neville, Susan, and Daphne. “Help the others create defenses around the bank. Getting it is the easy part, keeping it away from Voldemort once he realizes what happened might be the challenge.”

They nodded, passing Lily who looked quite frantic at something she heard.

“Congratulations on your victory, you two, you deserve it,” said Lily but she grew serious. “However, I’m afraid it’s happened. Voldemort has defeated the Ministry of Magic and now has taken control. He plans on coming here next; it was just broadcasted over the Wireless a minute ago, some of us took a listen to it to see if anything was happening. People evacuated but no one knows who was alive or dead.”

Harry and Ginny exchanged a look, but there were slight smiles. While they hoped that no one who would be a help had died, Voldemort grabbing control of the Ministry was exactly what they needed for their inevitable plans.

Taking over the Ministry might have garnered some resistance. However, rebuilding a broken and battered government and restoring order was another matter entirely.

Still, the fighting was not over. It had just barely begun.

And that’s the end of Chapter Forty Six. Forty Seven should have some fallout for the events of this chapter.

See you sometime next week.

Chapter Forty Seven: Aftershocks

The events of the last several hours would be felt for some time to come. Word reached most of Britain from the Wireless that Lord Voldemort had managed to take over the Ministry of Magic in a hostile takeover. The Minister of Magic was missing, no one knew if she was alive or not. The Head Auror was murdered and the other Aurors were either missing, slain, or had fled with the Minister of Magic. Whether or not any of those people had escaped with their lives intact would be something that would remain a subject for debate. Quite frankly, the world awaited in fear, for the next move of Lord Voldemort, who bulldozed the Ministry of Magic. Despite the fact that many of his followers were struck down, at least a fourth of his invading force, many had remained alive and helped secure Voldemort's victory. Not to mention the allies that he had in the Ministry and the countless individuals who would be coerced into joining him into the future.

Minerva McGonagall sighed, as she sat in the Staff Room with all of the other teachers of Hogwarts. There was business to attend to before the next year but now the future of Hogwarts remained in doubt with this latest peace of business. Professor Flitwick listened to the latest broadcast, with the newscaster having a very shaky voice, it was obvious that he thought he might be struck down if he said anything that would be remotely negative regarding Lord Voldemort. Slowly, Flitwick turned to Minerva.

"What now?" asked Flitwick, which was on the mind on each and every teacher in that staff room right now and countless others around the country.

"At this point, Filius, your guess is quite frankly as good as mine," responded Minerva in a tired voice. She felt like she aged twenty years in the past few days, trying to find a way to maintain a school that would not have financial support to give students who were unable to pay their education not that those who will well off had it much easier. Without any access to their gold, with the goblins sealing off Gringotts, they had nothing. Even the Muggleborns would suffer, as inflation in the Muggle World was going up, although no

one there had any reason why. Minerva heard that it was driving the Muggle Government positively mad.

“Doomsday is here, my children, it is what we seers have feared for millennia,” said Professor Trelawney with wide eyes. “The strike by the goblins was the first sign, the next sign was He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named has taking over the Ministry, and the next sign will be the end of the world as we know it and I guarantee you none of us will be feeling fine.”

“Please, not any of this Divination nonsense today, it’s not going to help us figure out what’s going on here,” responded Minerva.

“Far from nonsense Minerva, it is coming, in fact the Triwizard Tournament may have been the trigger to set up a cataclysmic chain of events that will lead us to the end of one world and the beginning of another, only a lucky few will benefit, others will be crushed, it is a change that can’t be stopped,” said Trelawney and the other teachers decided the best policy would be just to let her talk until she got it out of her system and then to ignore it ever happening. However, Trelawney seemed to sense that no one was heeding her dire warnings. This was no tea leaf reading or crystal ball gazing, events that only played a small significance to the overall fabric of reality. This was an event of cosmic proportions that would either change everything for the better or destroy it completely. Most leaned towards destruction, as did Trelawney. “It is just as well, you can’t stop them right now, but it is an event that has been seen by many possessing the Inner Eye have seen over the years. But I will speak no more of this nonsense as you call it.”

“With all this going down, where is Potter in all of this?” asked Professor Vector suddenly.

“That’s something we’d both like to know,” responded McGonagall. “Dumbledore mentioned something about Potter and his friends leaving Hogwarts and not coming back until some mission that he gave them is completed, but getting details out of Albus Dumbledore is about as futile as getting Peeves to stop causing chaos. I was unable to ask Potter before he departed for the summer, due to all

that went down at the end of last year and now who knows where he is. If he has any sense, he may not show up this year anyway.”

A loud crash echoed from outside the Hogwarts gates, causing McGonagall to bolt to her feet.

“Surely they could not have gotten here this soon, after what happened,” said Professor Sprout in a hushed voice. “Not already, not this soon after the Ministry of Magic.”

“I don’t know, but it would be prudent to check out the situation at any rate,” remarked McGonagall as she lead all of the teachers out. Another crash briefly caused McGonagall to wonder if someone was trying to crack open the Anti-Apparation wards, which would be dire if they someone succeeded. She forced open the castle doors, wand ready, to hex anything that looked remotely threatening. She gasped when she saw it.

She saw the battered form of Amelia Bones, who looked like she had just survived some great war, several nasty gashes on her face and arms, with her robes ripped slightly and giving a pained groan, looking like it pained her to breathe because of broken ribs.

“Poppy, get her up to the Hospital Wing right away, it doesn’t look like she has much time left before she...” said McGonagall trailing off and Madam Pomfrey nodded, before she conjured a stretcher, putting the battered form of Amelia Bones onto it. She winced, as they got her to the Hospital Wing for the proper treatment.

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The members of the D.A, along with their allies sat in a large spacious conference room, which once belongs to the goblins. The D.A. Leaders sat in front, as Harry turned to them, Ginny sitting by his side.

“First of all, I’ve got good news, bad news, and horrible news,” said Harry. “The good news is after several hours of battle and hard work; we have managed to liberate Gringotts from the iron clutches of the goblin nation. There are still goblins out there, forty percent of their

population but unless they want to become an extinct magical creature, they won't try anything. Nevertheless, there are protections around the bank and I hope they would be more than sufficient to keep any undesirables out of the bank until we get this mess sorted out. Good job on that work all of you who helped out, your work is appreciated as we continue to change the Wizarding World for the better, one step at a time."

"Unfortunately good must come with the bad and five people perished today, with others lucky not too and while those people should be remembered, we should also realize that if it was not for your hard work and your ability to work together to achieve a goal, more would of died, so great job on that front and I hope you continue to maintain the same standard," said Ginny.

"We would be nothing without any of you," remarked Astoria. "Two years ago, we couldn't even defend ourselves against the lowliest Death Eater and now we beat the goblins. Thanks to Harry and Ginny, for setting up the Defense Association to help us achieve all of this and improve to a level that Hogwarts, along with the laws at the Ministry, would never allow us to."

The others nodded, even the other four leaders and Harry and Ginny looked modest, but secretly, they were pleased at the fact they got the credit for the greatest attained by the Defense Association and the majority of their success had to do with their hard work, but that was not the only thing.

"Well we all played our part in this great victory I think," said Harry with a smile.

"Okay, you've told us good news and bad news, now, I think some of us have a good idea of what this horrible news is," said Daphne as the other people in the room, both in the D.A, along with their allies awaited with anticipation.

"While we were busy thrashing the goblins, Lord Voldemort attacked the Ministry of Magic and overwhelmed him, now he is in control of the Ministry and all of its resources, along with any employees still unfortunate enough to be inside," said Harry and people gasped,

some fearfully. Many had family members working in the Ministry and Ginny decided to quickly interject herself in.

"I'm sure many of you want information, you have people inside the Ministry that you are worried about, whether they are alive or dead, but the thing is, there had not been much concrete news of any death in the Ministry of Magic, other than rumors so far and we'd like to have more concrete evidence on what happened inside the Ministry and who was killed," said Ginny and the others nodded in an understanding manner.

"My Aunt..." stated Susan but Harry decided to field this one.

"She's said to get out but whether she made it out alive or not, we don't know, no one knows which is good in some ways because if there was any news, Voldemort would know and might finish the job," said Harry and Susan nodded grimly, Harry had a point, no matter how morbid it is. "If Voldemort had outright killed her, he would have made it known right away but right now he is waiting in the dark as much as we are."

"So a waiting game pretty much to see what's going to happen," said Neville.

"We do know one thing, he's liking to come after Gringotts now that he has the Ministry," added Luna.

"He doesn't know that we have it, though," answered Daphne and Harry responded by shaking his head, before taking a deep breath.

"No, he doesn't, as far as I know and we're not going to give it up after the hard fight we endured, despite his control of the Ministry of Magic, we have the advantage, as we control the gold and we'll hold ourselves up in this bank for as long as necessary until Voldemort gives me what I want," responded Harry before he paused, before elaborating for some of the D.A. members who looked slightly baffled at what Harry was talking about. "One more duel, this time to the death, this time where I will finish off Voldemort for good, the final obstacle for progression. The Ministry will be in shambles and I'm sure when the smoke clears, we'll find many people who would like to

help rebuild it from scratch, to prevent something like Voldemort from ever happening again.”

“I know if she’s alive, Aunt Amelia will help in any way she can and I will too,” said Susan as many others nodded.

“Any help is much appreciated, if it’s help and not a way to further someone else’s agenda,” said Harry but he paused, before he held his hand up to silence the chattering members of the D.A. He heard a slithering sound, there was someone or rather something listening in on every word of their meeting.

“The Dark Lord will be thrilled about this,” said a low hiss that Harry could just make out. He turned to Ginny before he whispered “Nagini” in her ear. Several people leaned forward curiously, before Harry turned to the D.A. Leaders motioning for them to get up.

“We’ll be back in a minute, I’m afraid we have a bit of a pest control problem to deal with,” responded Harry as Ginny, Daphne, Susan, Neville, and Luna followed him, where they spotted Nagini trying to make a quick getaway but Harry pointed his wand and a large cage sprang out of the ground, trapping Nagini, causing her to give a surprise hiss as Harry walked over, before he kneeled down, face to face with the familiar of Lord Voldemort. “Hello, Nagini, long time no see.”

“Potter,” hissed Nagini. “Let me out of here now.”

“Why so you could report back to your Master everything you heard?” asked Harry. “What kind of fool do you take me for?”

“The kind that makes a mockery out of my Master, despite the fact that he would be killed for doing so,” hissed Nagini and Harry turned to his D.A. leaders.

“What did she say?” asked Luna.

“She says she wants to do inappropriate acts with Lord Voldemort,” said Harry and the other members of the D.A. gave disgusted faces before Harry bent down to go face to face with Nagini once again.

“Alright you cheeky little serpent, I was going to kill you out in the hallway, but now I’m going to humiliate you in front of an entire group of people.”

“You don’t have the nerve to kill me, human,” hissed Nagini with a smug express. “The Dark Lord would not have placed me in this position.”

“I just had a couple thousand goblins bloodily slaughtered, what do you think I’m going to do to you?” asked Harry as he levitated the cage, with Nagini giving several hisses that consisted of words that were not too nice but he led the others into the next room where Harry placed the caged snake on the table. “For those of you not familiar with her, this is Lord Voldemort’s snake familiar, Nagini. She is most infamous for killing Arthur Weasley but...you know what Nagini, you’re right, I’m not going to kill you.”

“I knew it, you were too soft, Lord Voldemort will make you pay you filthy little human,” hissed Nagini.

“He won’t, but you’re not going to be killed by my wand,” said Harry, before he turned to Ginny, who had a smile on her face when she realized where this was going as Harry looked at Nagini. “Ginny is, to remove that filthy little Horcrux and then whatever remains of you, I’m going to make into a pair of boots that I’m going to stomp Voldemort with after I defeat him.”

Harry stepped back, allowing Ginny to move forward, as she aimed a spell. A deadly black light escaped her wand that struck Nagini. The snake gave a pained hiss as it was ripped open. The moment it was killed, the Horcrux of Voldemort broke free, before it fluttered into the air and burst into nothingness.

“And now, Lord Voldemort can and will be killed,” responded Harry as he pulled Ginny close, before he kissed her. They shared this passionate kiss for several minutes, realizing that they were just one step away from ridding the world of Voldemort for good and that was killing the Dark Lord himself. They slowly pulled apart, before they looked at the Defense Association. “Now the bank has been concluded and you have all fought well today, Dobby the house elf

has kindly brought over sleeping bags so you could sleep in the bank, along with refreshments to celebrate our victory, thank you Dobby.”

“The pleasure is all mine, Harry Potter, sir,” said Dobby in an excited voice as many people jumped, not realizing that Dobby had been there for the moment except for the few who managed to see him and were amused by the surprised looks on the face of everyone.

“Now the bank is ours, Lord Voldemort’s Horcruxes are all gone, Voldemort will be gone in the coming days, and we’ll go from there, and...there is the matter of the mysterious hooded D.A. member that dropped goblins right and left earlier today, so...” said Harry before he motioned towards Lily, who took her hood off to the gasps to everyone inside of the conference room. “Oh, and this is my mother, who came back from the dead a couple of days ago in a set of circumstances that she’ll explain to you because Ginny and I have a few matters to attend to before we can begin our private celebration.”

“Only Harry could drop a bombshell like that as an afterthought,” remarked Daphne as Susan nodded, with Harry and Ginny walking off as Lily just frowned, it was just like those two to leave her to do all the explaining. Still she cleared her throat, to go into the same story she could recite in her sleep by now.

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Amelia gave a pained mumble as she woke up in the Hogwarts Hospital Wing, as Poppy Pomfrey stood over her to contact Minerva, who had requested to know immediately when Amelia was awake. She had heard bits and pieces as she struggled to regain consciousness from her evacuation of the Ministry. Footsteps were heard as Amelia looked up to see Minerva McGonagall, who was business like as usual. Some things never changed.

“I made it to Hogwarts, for a while I worried, but I doubt the others were as lucky,” responded Amelia.

“There were no others that I was aware of,” responded Minerva in a business like tone of voice, as she looked at the Minister of Magic, or

rather the former Minister of Magic, as she obviously had no more power under a Voldemort controlled Ministry. "What happened?"

"We managed to get out, not after several people were killed and others were not so lucky, they are still in there," responded Amelia, as she winced, her ribs were still tender. "When we got outside, we were spotted by some of Voldemort's supporters, who attacked us. It was though luck that we just managed to avoid getting murdered. Well I can't speak for the others, now that Voldemort is in control, we're going to have all sorts of individuals crawling out of the woodwork, to do his bidding, many who had went under ground but now when he's in power...I don't even want to think what might happen. Has he made a play for Hogwarts, yet?"

"Not right now, but that time has to be coming, I'd imagine and I don't know what we'll do, Gringotts is still closed, so hopefully he'll remain occupied with that, until this Hogwarts situation can be pieced together," said Minerva, as Albus had always mentioned that the three most vital components that Voldemort would want control of is Gringotts, the Ministry, and Hogwarts. Now he had the Ministry and had the resources to take control of the other two, with some careful planning.

"I don't wish to intrude on Hogwarts for too long, I pose a danger but I do hope..." said Amelia as she trailed off. "Do you by any chance have a way of contacting Harry Potter? It's...I feel almost ashamed but we do need him."

"I was about to ask you that, no, I have no idea where he could be," said Minerva, which was a half truth. She could not bring herself to admit to Amelia that she had been enabling Dumbledore's activities outside the law that helped in part groom Harry into some kind of successor. Despite all that happened, Harry trusted Dumbledore beyond all reason to the bitter end and Minerva could not understand why. She respected Dumbledore in many ways, but as a person, there were times where she felt him to be lacking in moral fiber. The fact that he withheld certain information from Harry and others for that matter, that could be of benefit to him was appalling to her. It was a wonder that Dumbledore was among the few people that got killed and there were more.

“He was at the Ministry just yesterday, an altercation against Lord Voldemort, he was gone and we just managed to catch a glimpse of Voldemort before he fled,” said Amelia. “Then, no one I’ve spoken to knows where he’s gone.”

“Well at least he’s not dead, Voldemort wouldn’t shut up if that was the case,” responded Minerva, but there appeared to be no way to contact the only person who could stand up to Voldemort. The papers had speculated Harry was the Chosen One, the one to bring down the Dark Lord and whether or not that was true was up for debate. The fact was that Harry managed to survive more encounters with Voldemort than anyone else and also managed to coordinate the defenses of Hogwarts in a way that the Death Eaters caused as few casualties as possible was remarkable. “Our next move will be dependent on what he does next and I just shudder when I think of the innocent lives will be put in peril.”

Amelia nodded; she would be a fool to not realize that there was some form of resistance out there against Voldemort that worked above and beyond the Ministry law. In fact, even though Dumbledore had been ordered to dismantle the Order of the Phoenix, it would stand to reason that he would have assembled it, under a new leader, with that leader answering to Dumbledore. Technically getting around the Ministry of Magic’s orders and not breaking his word. Minerva knew but Amelia decided not to answer. She was not in the position to do anything other than complain right now and besides, if she had been left out there, she would have perished for certain.

“I will rest until I am well and then leave,” said Amelia firmly in a voice that left no room at all for argument and Minerva reluctantly nodded. “There are other pockets of resistance out there, I hope to do what I can to help retake the Ministry from Voldemort.”

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In the main office at Gringotts, Harry and Ginny were both right by the fireplace in the office.

"The new security measures are completely in place, Gringotts is protected from anyone that we don't want to get in," said Harry.

"What would it take to force open the protections?" asked Ginny.

"A miracle or an explosion that will level all of London," responded Harry. "I'm not opening these doors for anyone, until Voldemort meets me on my terms."

"I'm astonished at all the rooms that were being used for nothing in this bank, what do the goblins need with so much space?" asked Ginny.

"I'll have my uses, but what happened in the past should stay in the past," said Harry as a message appeared on his desk. "Everyone's finally calmed down after that shock I've given them. It took a while but now they accept that Mum's back alive, even though there was a lot of explaining. Now they're all working on a plan to help try and figure out what's going on the outside, without breaching the protections I had placed around the bank."

"Is there any way to do that?" asked Ginny.

"If they think of I way, I'll do it but I'm pretty sure if I think long enough, I can figure something out, along with bringing the families of people here, at least the one's that we know we can trust for sure," said Harry and Ginny nodded. "All those rooms that the goblins have, it should be enough to have people stay here. Still there are many people I know I can trust, providing they're still alive, from my dealings at the Ministry. As for others, I don't trust them and would have to make them sign a magically binding contract before I even consent for them to stay here."

"Now what about Voldemort?" asked Ginny. "You said you would let him know that you now have the bank. I think this is the best time, now that Nagini has been killed, to force his hand."

"Just getting around to that right now, that the Floo Connection from Gringotts to the Ministry has been properly calibrated, to block Voldemort from trying anything," said Harry as he held up the Floo

Powder, turning to the fireplace. "I hope he's home."

Harry threw the Floo Powder right into the roaring fire.

"Minister of Magic's Office!" called Harry, as he braced himself, waiting for Lord Voldemort to answer his Floo.

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Lord Voldemort sat in room that was formerly the Minister of Magic's office, but he made a few modifications to turn it into his throne room where he would rule over all magical people in this country. He was pleased that he no longer had to use his filthy father's house as an outpost for his plans. Still, the Ministry of Magic would only be part one of his overall plan, once he had control of both Gringotts and Hogwarts, along with all of their secrets, he would be invincible. No one could stop him, not even Harry Potter, not that the boy had the ability to do so now. A few lucky triumphs and the misguided fools thought of him as someone special. Really, he was nothing but Dumbledore's puppet, and now that Voldemort had Dumbledore murdered, Potter's days were number.

Right now he was working on a plan involving the Muggleborn witches and wizards in this country. To his followers that were only in this for their misguided vision of blood purity, it would be to track them down and lock them up for fouling up the Wizarding World. However, Voldemort had a much different purpose intended for them, when they were rounded up. Living weapons to use in his plans of conquest, the first line of defense to soften up his enemies, before he commenced with his real attacks. He planned to kidnap Muggleborn children who had shown magical potential and train them up, to be mindless drones, their only purpose would be to serve Lord Voldemort no matter what cost.

Suddenly, Voldemort was brought out of his ambition plans when the fireplace in his office came to life.

"My Lord, it is a call coming from the main office at Gringotts," said the Death Eater in charge of regulating the calls. "Should I..."

"Allow it," responded Voldemort, who was interested. Perhaps the goblins had finally come to their senses and were willing to submit themselves to Lord Voldemort's will. However, much to his surprise, a very familiar and unwelcome face appeared in the fire, taunting Voldemort with a smirk. "Potter!"

"That's my name, Riddle, don't wear it out," said Harry as he looked at Voldemort, who looked like a fish out of water with the expression on his face.

"I was under the impression that this call was coming from Gringotts," said Voldemort who was baffled.

"Surely someone of your supposed intelligence might have figured this out by now but I guess I often times give you way too much credit, more than you are worth at any rate," answered Harry and Voldemort looked enraged at the slight that Harry gave him. "However, there were no fireplaces crossed, this is a call from the new owner of Gringotts."

"WHAT?" demanded Voldemort in a thunderous voice, as he looked at Potter with utter contempt. "How did an insignificant little child like you take control of Gringotts?"

"Slaughtering sixty percent of the world's goblins is normally a good start, but the fact of the matter is, I did something you dreamed of for decades Voldemort, I gained control of Gringotts, something your worthless minions might have done in time had they been allowed to but how many of them would have been slaughtered?" asked Harry. "Dozens most likely where only five of mine were killed. The true mark of a leader is not the victories they achieve, but rather how well the people they lead fight and survive. The statistics are there Voldemort, even you could admit that I did better than you would have done."

"If my followers get themselves killed, then they are worthless and can be replaced," said Voldemort coldly, brushing off the fact that Harry had an entire army of people that was willing to fight for him. "If

you breeched Gringotts easily then I should have no difficulty in doing so. I would highly recommend that you surrender..."

"Or you will make me suffer a slow and agonizing death," interrupted Harry in a bored voice as he rolled his eyes. "This is just getting a bit tiresome Riddle, hearing the same things coming out of your mouth time and time again, when you've done nothing to prove me wrong. I'm still standing, breathing, and not six feet under while your Death Eaters have been sliced to ribbons. When Draco Malfoy is one of your most valuable Death Eaters, that's quite frankly rather sad and quite pathetic, that you've fell to that."

"You dare mock me Potter," said Voldemort.

"Yes, yes, I do," responded Harry. "The question is, what are you going to do about it?"

"I will slaughter you Potter, you can't hide from me forever," answered Voldemort.

"You willing to put your money where your mouth is, Riddle?" inquired Harry before speaking when Voldemort answers. "We've never had a proper duel, they've all gotten interrupted for one reason or another, but I, Harry James Potter, challenge you, Tom Marvolo Riddle, to a duel. Not just any duel, we will be bound by a magical agreement that neither of us can give up and the duel only ends when one of us dies. If any of us tries to run, we die. It's that simple. Because, I don't intend on going around with you in circles for the rest of my life, I have my own plans for the Wizarding World and you're not a part of them."

"I refuse to even dignify your challenge Potter, I decline, I will have you eliminated when I take Gringotts," said Voldemort.

"That challenge wasn't a request, because for every hour you refuse to face me, I take the assets of one Death Eater, convert it into Muggle money, and donate it to a Muggle Orphanage," responded Harry as Voldemort's face contorted into an ugly scowl. "You know the type of place that you have so many fond childhood memories of."

"I don't believe you Potter," said Voldemort in an attempt to call his bluff but Harry just smirked. "Gringotts will be mine and I will see to it that you will die."

"By that time, I will have given away so much ill-gotten pureblood gold that morale will be shot all to hell and back, but I'll stop once you give me what I want and that's a duel with you, to give me a chance to put you six feet under and keep you there," said Harry before he paused. "Send one of your little errand boys outside the bank if you change your mind and I leave you with this thought. It's eleven o'clock, do you know where your familiar is?"

Potter's face disappeared from the Floo, as it slowly dawned on Voldemort what he had said and his face contorted into a scowl when he realized Nagini had been found out and likely killed. Voldemort cared less about the snake, but the Horcrux within was another matter entirely. Still, all of his other Horcruxes were safe, other than the one Lucius bungled, so his immortality was still secured.

Still he refused to even entertain Potter's challenge. The brat had some nerve challenging him to a duel as if he was an equal.

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"He didn't accept my challenge for a duel," said Harry as he turned to Ginny. "A shame, my birthday is coming up tomorrow and the greatest present I could think of was the defeat of Lord Voldemort."

"He's going to try something sooner or later," remarked Ginny and Harry nodded.

"He would, but none of its going to work, each and every Death Eater he sends, will be picked off, until he decides to face me properly," said Harry, gripping hands with Ginny.

"So who is the first Death Eater who will be giving a generous donation to a Muggle Orphanage?" asked Ginny and Harry looked thoughtful for a minute.

“Rodolphus Lestrangle will do nicely I think, he is one of the few fanatics that didn’t meet their downfall in time but ruining him financially would do nicely, and then if Voldemort doesn’t meet my demands in an hour after that, his brother will go next and vaults will dry up one by one,” said Harry. “I will also have them sent a nice hand written message telling them what I’ve done. That should stir up things rather nicely.”

“That’s cruel Harry,” said Ginny in a mocked outrage voice before she smiled and wrapped her arms around Harry’s neck. “I love it.”

“I thought you might,” answered Harry, as he kissed her. The kiss continued, as they celebrate their great triumph in helping lead the Defense Association Army and their allies to the victory over the goblin nation, along with knockout at the last Horcrux. Harry made a mental note to let Voldemort know that all of his Horcruxes had been destroyed just as the last breath escaped from the Dark Lord’s body.

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“The child is arrogant,” said Snape swiftly, as he sat in the Wizengamot Chambers in the dead of night, with several other Death Eaters, including Draco Malfoy, who looked disgusted when he heard this meeting was with Potter. Still as Snape sat here, he knew this complicated Dumbledore’s plans for the boy a great deal and was at a loss how to proceed.

“His arrogance may be evident, but the fact is somehow, perhaps by a fluke, he has taken control of Gringotts and had defeated the goblins, but it just serves us as well, as it will kill two Phoenixes with one Killing Curse,” said Voldemort. “Potter and the bank in one fell swoop...”

“The goblins must not have been that great if they lost to Potter and his blood traitor friends,” remarked Draco snidely. “Anyone who can’t even beat someone like Potter is quite frankly rather pathetic.”

Snape winced as Voldemort scowled. Obviously Draco had no idea what he just implied through his words.

“So, Draco, tell me, do you think you could defeat Potter?” asked Voldemort calmly and Draco’s eyes looked up.

“Absolutely, my Lord, no problem about it,” said Draco and Voldemort just looked at Malfoy, a plan formulating in his head. So far, the boy had managed to be lucky and survive several death defying suicide missions, but the plan that was forming in Voldemort’s head would cause Draco’s luck to run out.

“Well, Potter doubts that, when we had our conversation, he called you quite frankly pathetic and a weak excuse for a wizard, who doesn’t even deserve to breath the same air as the Boy-Who-Lived,” said Voldemort calmly and Draco looked outraged. “I would think one of my most trusted followers would not let that arrogant comment go without any retribution.”

“You would be correct, my Lord, I beg of you, the honor to finally put Potter in his place and find a way to open up the doors of Gringotts, so you can take it over,” said Draco in a pleading voice, as if he was a small child begging his parents for more sweets.

“You have been quite successful on your past missions but I offer you a final test and I will cease judging by on the merits of your father’s countless mistakes,” said Voldemort. “Kill Potter. If you succeed, you will be rewarded. Should you fail, I would advise you not to return.”

“I won’t fail my Lord, you can count on me,” said Draco.

“Good, then leave immediately, time waits for no wizard and your time to prove yourself by bringing down Potter begins now,” said Voldemort and Draco leaved, an arrogant, supreme look on his face.

“What now, my Lord?” asked Dolohov as Draco had departed from the room.

“One of two things will occur, either we have been reading young Draco wrong and he is of value or it will be an amusing slaughter that I will have to pull from Potter’s brain and enjoy once I kill him,” stated Voldemort softly and most Death Eaters obviously had an opinion of which option it was.

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The next morning, the Defense Association Army sat, with their leaders up front, waiting for the next move.

"I have some news, first of all, Lord Voldemort's refusal to duel me has resulted in seven Death Eaters losing every Knut to their name and within the next half of an hour, an eighth Death Eater will be wiped out, with his assets being converted to Muggle money," said Harry.

"We believe that Voldemort is mobilizing for something to take Gringotts but we don't know what that entails of either," added Ginny.

"On a lighter note, Lord Voldemort has apparently sent one of his Death Eaters to finish off Harry," said Lily and the people looked confused, on why this could be a lighter note. "He has sent Draco Malfoy."

The Defense Association Army began laughing but Harry looked outraged.

"How could you people laugh?" asked Harry. "I don't find this funny. I find it insulting, that Draco Malfoy would be sent for me. The Lestranges or maybe some Dementors or at least the elder Crabbe or Goyle, but Draco Malfoy, that's a kick below the belt. Voldemort has just spit in my face with this little action."

"I don't know what appears to be sadder, the fact that Malfoy is being sent by Voldemort or the fact that the arrogant little prat thinks he has ever chance of winning a duel with you," said Neville as he looked at Harry.

"The only way Draco could beat Harry, as if Harry passes out and hits his head from laughing too hard at his pathetic attempts," contributed Susan.

"Now, I don't think you should be taking Draco lightly," said Luna seriously. "I mean he has, hang on, what has he done of any value?"

“He threatened to tell his father on anyone who remotely inconvenienced him, hid behind Crabbe and Goyle, and stole some undisclosed rare magical items from Lord Voldemort, after running like a coward,” responded Daphne. “Not the first time he showed that trait of his personality.”

“Should be no problem then Harry, I was confusing Draco with someone who might actually have a hope,” said Luna. “How long do you think it will take for you to wipe the floor with him?”

“Seconds, but it won’t be happening, because I’m not going to face Malfoy,” said Harry with such a curt tone of voice that it took everyone aback.

“Yes, Harry and I discussed it and we both agreed that he’s not worth either of our times, but I’m sure one of you might want to step up and teach him a lesson, in fact a number of you might want to,” said Ginny.

“So who wants to step up and handle our light work?” asked Harry and Daphne opened her mouth to answer. She had wanted to make Malfoy suffer after what he did to Astoria, but before she could answer, another voice spoke up.

“I’ll do it,” responded Astoria in a firm voice as the six D.A. Leaders turned to her, but Harry and Ginny were both smiling at her.

That’s the end of the chapter. A lot of fall out from the last chapter and the next chapter should be an interesting one, as the final confrontation between Harry and Lord Voldemort is coming, where the world may never be the same again.

See you again soon for the next chapter.

Chapter Forty Eight: Punishment.

More than a few people were taken aback by Astoria boldly volunteering to be the one to take care of Draco Malfoy. They were quite aware of the feelings she harbored from Draco in the past and also the harsh reality check when Draco had left her to be tortured by the Cruciatus Curse. It was something that any of them would have thought about every day of their lives, had it been them in her shoes and in fact, many of them had little reason to doubt that Astoria did not forget. She wanted to make Draco pay.

"I'll do it," repeated Astoria, more to convince herself that it was something she was willing to do. For years, she had pined after Draco and in hindsight; she was at a loss to understand why. Perhaps it was because she was a foolish, naïve little girl, that had no idea what anything was like. Just because Draco was moderately good looking and had a decent amount of gold, she was blinded to his many, many, more obvious flaws. That was fine, Astoria was willing to accept blame for her own blind stupidity. Thanks to Harry and Ginny, they helped her get over that with the Cruciatus Curse being the final straw that eliminated any hope she had for Draco being redeemed. However, Draco was obviously fully aware of her feelings for him and had manipulated her on a few occasions, in helping covering up some of his misdeeds bullying Muggleborn students. He used her for his own purposes, with Astoria thinking that if she got close to Draco, he might change, a foolish notion in hindsight. She was wrong and she wanted to wring his pitiful neck for what he did to her.

"I figured you might be the one to step up and volunteer, Astoria," said Harry after a short pause, as he exchanged a smile with Ginny, who looked like she had seen this coming as well. Both of them stood facing off against Astoria.

"The question is, do you think you're emotionally ready to face Draco after what happened?" asked Ginny.

"I am," answered Astoria in a firm, confident voice before she took a deep breath. "For years of my life, I held out hope, all the time that

was wasted, that I could have spent my time focusing on something better. The D.A. helped me gain that focus, but after what Draco did, I want to kill him. I want to make him suffer, just like I suffered under the Cruciatus Curse, while he watched, like the coward he is. I want to hurt him in the worst way possible, to make him understand, to make him realize what I felt. That's the only way I can fully move on with my life, by making him suffer before I end his life."

"I think we have a clear answer that that question, on whether or not Astoria is ready," remarked Harry as he turned to Ginny with a smile which she exchanged.

"I think we do, but does anyone else have any concerns before we take this course of action?" asked Ginny, as she turned to the various D.A. members that had been assembled in the room but they all shook their heads. They had all seen Astoria perform in the D.A. meetings and she was among one of the most talented, always taking the opportunity to improve her abilities.

"I don't see anything wrong with it, personally myself," responded Luna.

"I don't either," added Neville.

"I've seen what Astoria could do, she's just a few levels below Harry and Ginny power wise, she should be able to handle anything Malfoy dishes out no problem," contributed Susan as Astoria had gotten a personal vote of confidence from five of the six D.A. leaders and that left her sister. Daphne just looked at Astoria, a rather serious look on her face before she took a deep breath.

"Are you really sure you can handle this, Astoria?" asked Daphne in a completely serious tone of voice.

"Daphne, I said I could," replied Astoria in a patient voice that seemed to be rather forced. "I have to do this..."

"You feel you do, I know that, but when you begin that duel, there is no turning back, Draco obviously doesn't want to concern himself with you, he's after Harry, that's who Voldemort sent him after," said

Daphne. "You are a roadblock in his way, so I hope for your sake that you don't have any moral hang ups, any hesitation about doing everything you can to put him down for good so he won't be a problem any more. Because, he is obsessed with making Harry pay for everything and he's a Death Eater now. He's still arrogant, self serving, yes, but Voldemort might have taught him a few tricks. Don't let him fool you..."

"I'm not scared of him and I don't pity him any more, he's just like any other enemy that we're facing," said Astoria. "The boy I had a crush on...was a figment of my imagination and now that I've seen the real Draco Malfoy, I want to rip out his lungs and stomp on them. I want to mangle his face to pieces. I remember some of the things he said about Ginny and Harry too, and while they're not fighting him, I want to make them pay for that too. He thinks he's special because he is a pureblood, well his blood will be spilled just like anyone else. Don't think for one second that I'm going to go soft on him. I'm going to win this battle for the good of the D.A. as much as it will be more myself and I'm going to validate all the praise that Harry and Ginny have given me over the past couple of years."

"All of it well earned, by the way," responded Harry.

"Yes, Astoria, you've really done great," added Ginny as the others nodded.

"Yes, I guess you've done a decent job," responded Daphne and Astoria nodded, coming from her sister that was high praise from her. "Just mangle his little face beyond recognition, so even his own mother wouldn't be able to identify his corpse."

"That's the plan," said Astoria with an intense look in her eyes, it was scary how she got when she was focused, almost comparable to Harry and Ginny when they had their minds set on something.

"Astoria, can we have a word with you, privately for its time?" asked Ginny and Astoria nodded, before she followed Harry and Ginny from the room as the doors shut behind them the most they passed.

"Anyone who wants to eavesdrop on them, has to go through me," remarked Lily to several people who were edging towards the door and the dangerous glint in her eyes had caused them to back off. They were not going to try to test their luck with her.

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"Astoria all that I say that Draco is not a worthy opponent and I can wipe the floor with him..." stated Harry but Astoria just raised her hand.

"You could and he wouldn't be able to suffer for long enough, the duel would be last only the number of spells that he could manage plus one," said Astoria with a smile. "So there is no need to apologize for the fact you think you can easily beat him because you would easily beat him. No problem at all."

"Be that as it may, it's been nearly two months since we saw Draco, where he has been by the side of Lord Voldemort, I don't know what he's been taught but it could be valuable and dangerous, so I would watch your back," commented Ginny. "He might be arrogant, but he is also underhanded and will exploit any advantage he could. Especially if he has some dark arts spell that he, despite his below average abilities, had mastered. So watch out for anything and be ready for anything he throws at you..."

"I'm watching, believe me, but he won't catch me with any spells, I'm too quick and too smart for him," said Astoria. "He doesn't know it, because he sees me as a pathetic little girl who he could use and then all could be forgiven. I've spent more time around Draco Malfoy than it could be mentally healthy and I've learned a bit about how he thinks. He's both arrogant and over confident, thinking that he is good just because of his name and he's obsessed with what you do for some reason, Harry."

"Yes, Draco's obsession with me has always concerned me, I would suggest that he seek counseling if it wasn't for the fact that he was about to die," commented Harry lightly. "Still, remember, Astoria, he hurt you with what you did. He sat back and watched you get tortured. Did he feel any remorse for that? No, because he doesn't care,

because he's a selfish coward. He did that and he might do more if you allow him to."

"So the question is, what are you going to do about it?" asked Ginny to Astoria.

"I'm gong to make him regret whatever comment he was likely to make to get Voldemort to send him on this suicide mission, in fact I'm going to make him regret the day he was ever born," responded Astoria firmly. "He's not going to beat me. I'm taking him seriously but he won't be walking out of this bank alive. Six years, he's gotten away with everything, now I'm going to make sure he never gets away with anything ever again."

"We'll be close by if you need us," said Harry.

"Thank you Harry, but no offense to your abilities, but I won't need you, I'm going to humiliate him then I'm going to make him suffer," said Astoria, as she got up to his feet, impatiently pacing around, wishing that Draco had shown up by now. The look on her face was very difficult to misplace, it appeared to be something that she had envisioned doing for quite some time. "Then, I'm going to put the world of its misery once and for all when I remove the blemish that Draco Malfoy is causing from the Wizarding World.."

"Once, we're in control, you'll get an Order of Merlin, First Class, for completely rubbing out the Malfoy line," said Ginny.

"And if I'm not mistaken, our little annoying insect should be arriving right about now," said Harry as he paused to cup his hand to his ear to listen, as did Ginny and Astoria.

"POTTER!" shouted the loud voice of Draco Malfoy, cutting though the mostly abandoned Diagon Alley, most had fled when word had reached them that Voldemort had taken control of the Ministry of Magic. "Open up the door of this bank and face me like a wizard. I said open up you half blooded coward, the Dark Lord doesn't have time for you but I'm going to make you pay and you will be at my mercy..."

Draco continued to rant but Harry just smiled and stared at the ceiling, as Draco shouted threats, along with boasts of his greatness because of his blood purity. It was only something Harry heard about five hundred or so times, he would have thought that Draco would have come up with something new.

"It looks like I'm right, soon you will get your chance to make him pay," said Harry. "Better take all the necessary precautions..."

"Better let him rant for a bit, to make sure he wasn't followed and then we'll open up the doors and I'll have you take it from there, Astoria," said Ginny.

"Thanks, I'm ready," said Astoria, as she leaned against the wall, wand in hand, planning a strategy in her mind about how she wanted to deal with Draco in the final few minutes before she finally got what was coming to her. She had all sorts of ideas flowing around in her head and she hoped that Draco would put up a bit of a fight, at least long enough for her to properly knock him around before putting him down.

One thing was for certain, she would win, no question about it.

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At Hogwarts, Amelia walked down the corridor, as quickly as her legs carried her. She looked outside the window at Hogwarts, it was so quiet and serene outside the castle walls. Beyond those gates, Amelia had no clue, with Voldemort in charge of the Ministry of Magic and most of the people who would have the nerve to oppose him, either hiding or having been killed. Harry Potter had been missing and she could not even begin to know where to look for him.

"Leaving so soon, Amelia," remarked Minerva in a quiet voice as she looked at the former Minister of Magic.

"It has to be done, I'd like to think that I might still have a few people out there that support me, that I can band together to perhaps do something about the hold Voldemort has on the Ministry," said Amelia. "Besides, you have your own problems. Hogwarts has always been a

concern and it was only a matter of time, sooner or later...with Dumbledore gone. No matter what he's done...he still kept Voldemort in check most of the time and the only other person who has stood up to Voldemort, well considering the fact he's missing right now, things do look rather bleak. Once Voldemort finds out I'm alive, he'll come right after me, I've been rather outspoken about there being harsh measures being taken ever against accused Death Eaters since the first war but none of the laws were changed. Since he couldn't kill Harry Potter, he would kill me to make an example."

"A grim assessment, but I've just heard the most peculiar rumors over the Wireless, it seems like a series of rather generous donations have been made to Muggle Orphanages," said Minerva and Amelia looked at her, interested by this. "What is strange is that Gringotts has been closed and even stranger yes, these donations have been done by noted pureblood supremacists."

"That is rather peculiar," admitted Amelia but she just shrugged it off. "Perhaps the goblins do have more of a sense of humor than we give them credit."

"Perhaps, but they still aren't looking to open the bank," said Minerva and Amelia shook her head.

"Not as far as I know, but I can't stay much longer, if I get out of this in one piece, I'll see you soon Minerva, if not, good luck with the rest of your life, Minerva," responded Amelia.

"Same to you," said Minerva with a nod, but there was some worry in the eyes of the normally stern woman.

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Snape retreated to the basement of one of the bases of operation used by the Order of the Phoenix. He looked over his shoulder, if Moody or any other Order members caught him here, they would hex first and ask questions never. Still, it was where one of the only two created portraits of Dumbledore resided, one of them obviously in the Headmaster's office at Hogwarts. Dumbledore had created a second painting, just a few weeks before his death, short after he had went

over his plans with Snape for Potter after Dumbledore met his demise and it would only activate once he had died. Still it only had his memories up until that point. Snape raised his wand, removing the cover from the painting, where Dumbledore opened his eyes.

"You seem troubled Severus," remarked Dumbledore casually.

"That would not be the half of it, Albus, Voldemort has seized control of the Ministry and I'm sure you know about what happen with Gringotts," said Snape.

"I've heard words from the other Headmasters and Headmistress when I visited Hogwarts, yes," remarked Dumbledore in a calm voice. "The goblins can be extremely thick headed and while it does seem like what we have planned may be off, I won't give up hope it can't be averted. Lord Voldemort will find a way to take control of Gringotts, just as he had taken control of the Ministry. He does have a way of accomplishing things, no matter how frustrating that is but in the end, he will be defeated by Harry once we stick to the plan. Speaking of which, I trust Harry and his friends are out on the hunt for the Horcruxes as we speak?"

"No," remarked Snape calmly.

"I'm rather intrigued, I would have assumed that Harry would have left immediately, especially when he had found out the locket was a fake," said Dumbledore with astonishment but Snape just looked disgusted, as if his stomach turned at the mere mention of Harry. "Am I mistaken?"

"Yes, because your golden boy decided to attempt to take control of Gringotts..." said Snape as almost as if it pained him to say the next sentence but Dumbledore had wondered if Harry had found out the Hufflepuff Cup was in that Gringotts Vault and he decided to go there first. He would have assumed that he would be after the locket first, but that was just how things worked. The plan was to get Harry the sword in time, with Severus passing it to him once he was named Hogwarts Headmaster.

"Please, Severus do conclude," said Dumbledore.

"That arrogant child actually managed to succeed overthrowing the goblins and now he's the one who has control of Gringotts," said Snape quickly and in a pained manner, clutching his hand to his chest briefly. "He's been building an army, at least that's what I managed to gather out of the Dark Lord and he has taunted the Dark Lord with the fact. His arrogance knows no bounds, but I'm afraid he still has nothing on Draco Malfoy who made some choice comments and the Dark Lord sent him on a suicide mission."

"Now, Severus, I'm afraid you're overreacting, Harry would never kill anyone, even someone like Draco," said Dumbledore in a confident voice.

"Those goblins just wouldn't have given up," responded Snape. "He had them all slaughtered."

"Well, sometimes things have to be done for the Greater Good," said Dumbledore slowly and Snape just sighed. "It was unfortunate that it had to come to this, but I suppose we can't hold Harry accountable for something that the goblins had instigated."

Snape just looked at Dumbledore. It was amazing what Dumbledore was willing to excuse but Snape wondered exactly how his life had come to this. He was arguing with a portrait.

"The Dark Lord will not take this lying down for much longer," said Snape, choosing his words wisely, as he did not want to anger Dumbledore, despite him being a shade of a memory in a portrait. His advice would be needed to help with any unforeseen consequences with the plan. "He may attack Potter sooner than we would have assumed and then all of our carefully laid plans will be lost..."

"Then it is your job to make sure Harry is warned of any attacks, I'm sure you will find a way, Severus," said Dumbledore as he remained in place in the portrait and Snape felt a burning in his forearm, before he looked at Dumbledore.

"The Dark Lord is calling, I best leave," said Snape. "I'll try and find a way to clean up this mess that your golden boy has created because of his recklessness."

Before Dumbledore could after, Snape disappeared away, to see what the Dark Lord wanted with him. There were a number of ongoing plans that the Dark Lord had brewing to extend his dominance and Snape doubted he would have any free time in the foreseeable future.

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"POTTER!" shouted Draco who was get more angry. He had been left outside the bank for a half of an hour and shouted until he nearly got horse. Several of his spells bounced off the doors but none of them came close to prying them open. "You half blooded little coward, let me inside, you want to make grandstand challenges to the Dark Lord, you coward, you will let me, I'm a pureblood, I won't be ignored..."

"So you really do think you can beat me, Malfoy?" asked a quiet voice which caused Draco. It was Potter and Malfoy clenched his fist in his wand. "Do you really think a filthy little pureblood coward who is magically impotent can even stand up to the wizard who fought Voldemort five times, more than anyone else, including Dumbledore?"

"I can beat you Potter, you're lucky that Dumbledore was now, I've been wanting to put you in your place for six years, after since you arrogantly spurned my offer for Weasley on the train," said Draco.

"Really, that's just sad," responded Harry. "If you can get to me, I'll entertain your offer for a duel, but I doubt you'll make it to me."

"So hiding behind your blood traitor friends, Potter," retorted Draco snidely.

"No, not really, it's just I don't have the time to deal with a petty little nuisance like you," said Harry in a bored voice. "Beat my protégé in a duel and I might offer you the time of day, but I doubt you'll succeed."

"So you've decided to hide behind your girlfriend, typical of you, Potter," stated Draco in a snide, arrogant, tone of voice.

"Ginny? Hardly, she doesn't have the time to deal with you either and besides, you need to be punished and this person I'm having you fight has a reason to draw out the punishment before you meet your end," said Harry. "Ginny and I would both beat you in seconds and while this person could as well, she doesn't want to, she wants to make you suffer for what you've done."

"Just stop talking and let me in, so I could defeat this person who was foolish enough to accept advice from you," said Draco in an impatient voice.

"Well since you asked me a nice way, come inside and meet your end," said Harry and the Gringotts doors opened. Draco stepped inside immediately and mere seconds later, the doors swung shut behind him.

"Alright, Potter says I'm going to fight someone here, so where are they?" demanded Draco in a superior voice as he looked around. "COME OUT AND SHOW YOURSELF! WHO DARES DEFY DRACO MALFOY?"

"That would be me," said Astoria in a calm voice, as she walked forward, not keeping her eyes off of Malfoy. His very sight just made her even more enraged and wanting to rip him into shreds, slowly and painfully.

"Greengrass, so you've decided to hide in Potter's little group and then lead me to him, well done, shows that you were a proper Slytherin, playing the spy" said Draco with a smug expression, knowing he could manipulate this one to do what he wanted. He had done so in the past, hiding a few of his more ugly misdeeds from Potter, although she was getting slightly uncooperative towards the end. "Well what are you waiting for? Perhaps if you do well, I may reward you."

"No, Malfoy, not this time, I'm here to defeat you, I offered to take care of this problem for Harry and Ginny, and many others as well,

that you victimized by your little attitude,” said Astoria as Draco turned to her before he began laughing. He obviously was not taking her seriously at all, she was a pathetic star struck girl in his eyes and would not even be worthy of his time.

“You, please, Potter must be more of a fool than I would have thought?” asked Draco as he looked at Astoria, as a scowl appeared on her face. “Still upset about when I walked away when you were being tortured?”

“Not entirely, but I’m really angry the fact you think you can use me without any consequences and then you laugh at me,” said Astoria as an intense look flickered in her eyes.

“It’s a shame Potter has manipulated you, turned you into a blood traitor but the Dark Lord may spare you yet and I’m only here to kill Potter,” said Draco who threw a minor curse to just incapacitate Astoria but she effortlessly blocked it with a shield. Another spell knocked Draco off of his feet and sent him crashing into a wall. Draco was winded but Astoria approached him, glaring at him.

“Up on your feet, Malfoy, you’re not cheating me out of my revenge!” shouted Astoria as she blasted balls of green fire right at Malfoy, forcing him to move. He was up to his feet and another spell was just barely blocked.

“I don’t know what you’re so mad about, it’s Potter who’s the problem, without him, you wouldn’t have been in position to be tortured by that Death Eater,” said Draco in what was almost a pleading voice, but Astoria knocked him around again, causing him to land on the ground.

“No, the Death Eaters were there, because your master put them there and he’s sent you right to your death, guess he really doesn’t give a damn about the Malfoy family name without your father’s money tied to it,” said Astoria as she sent more spells at Draco, some of them hitting, but others blocked, with Draco showing that he had a moderate level of talent, but he was beginning to become severely outclassed. “Harry on the other hand has worked tirelessly, contributed more to the Wizarding World in one day than you ever will and you think you are entitled to have things handed to you, just

because of what your last name is. You make me sick, I don't know why I ever even liked you in the first place."

"Because you are a foolish girl who obviously is pining for a way to better her life," responded Draco, but he got blasted right in the face with a purposely depowered cutting curse. The last thing Astoria wanted was for Draco to bleed to death before she was done with him. Still there was a nasty cut on his face and Draco angrily threw a few dangerous curses, after realizing that his face might have been disfigured. Astoria dodged them. "CRUCIO!"

The Cruciatus Curse was avoided by Astoria simply not being there when it hit, before she whipped her wand. A spiral of orange light struck Draco in the chest, all of the air knocked out of him. Another spell and Draco was thrown to the ground once again.

"Harry taught me that one, I think Ginny might have taught me that one, but I think they're doing their job nicely, it's obvious they actually are competent, when your master, all he wants is warm bodies," said Astoria as Draco's face was slowly being cut to ribbons, small cuts causing blood to drip to the ground. He also felt light headed and a black light struck his groin. Draco screamed, it felt like that region of his body had been lit on fire, despite the fact that there was no damage. "The fact is, you will never even be a hundredth of a wizard that Harry is. On your best day or his worst, you couldn't beat Harry if he had one hand tied behind his back and the other was helping you and you couldn't beat Ginny and...you most certainly won't beat me. They trained me, showing me what I can do with my powers, testing my limits to the full extent and they've proven that no one can touch them, along with showing me what I can do and I would never be this could if wasn't for Harry Potter and Ginny Weasley..."

"For Salazar's sake, why don't you just build a statue in Hogsmeade for both of them already," said Draco in a grumbling voice.

"Well, no one would build one for you, but it would be a nice way to attract pigeons," answered Astoria as another curse struck Draco, burning his eyebrows cleanly off. He attempted to throw an organ

shredding hex, but Astoria saw that one coming a mild away. There was a tell tale telegraph that they had been taught in the D.A. Draco was getting more frustrated, throwing a temper tantrum, as more curses narrowly avoided Astoria. Despite the fact that she wanted to rip Draco to shreds, she kept herself composed. "So, if I'm so pathetic why can't you beat me? I think you're confusing me with yourself as the pathetic one."

"You filthy little blood traitor, I was going to go easy on you, but if you don't get out of my way right now and let me at Potter, I'll make you pay," said Draco but Astoria threw another spell that Draco just barely blocked with a shield spell. He had it, he was one of the Dark Lord's most valued followers, who had been sent to kill Potter personally, he was not going to lose to someone who used to follow him around like a lovesick little girl. "AVADA KEDAVRA!"

Astoria conjured a solid stone shield before she threw herself to the ground. The shield blew up into several fragments and now she dodged around, catching Draco right in the spine with a paralyzing hex. He would be unable to move his limbs for at least an hour, maybe more depending on how power. Draco dropped to the ground, trying to will his arm to lift his wand but he could not do so. Astoria stood over him, blasting his wand from his hand.

"I took you down easily Draco and now you won't move, you think it was cute to leave me a miserable wreck and then you thought you could turn around, to use me again, like nothing had happened," said Astoria in a dangerous voice. "No, you selfish little bastard, that wasn't cute, that wasn't funny, that was the most horrible thing that ever happened to me in my life, and I'm ashamed that I ever even thought you could decent. I don't want to admit this to someone like you but you made me cry. Now, you know what, you're the one who is going to be crying when I humiliate you. There are dozens of people watching what is about to happen and they will see your humiliation."

"YOU BETTER UNDO THIS HEX NOW!" shouted Draco, unfortunately his jaw had not been paralyzed but Astoria shook her head, before she sent a cutting spell, ripping Draco's robes slightly. "What are you doing to me, you better answer..."

“Silencio,” said Astoria calmly and Draco was silenced, his mouth moving but no words coming out.

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In the next room, the D.A. and their allies watched intently, as Draco was slowly being picked apart. Harry and Ginny exchanged a look of pride as Astoria had brought Draco down to his knees, paralyzed, but it was quickly replaced with a look of revulsion when they realized what is going to happen.

“No, she couldn’t be that cruel,” remarked Daphne with wide eyes, she had no idea her sister had it in her.

“Please tell me she’s not going to do what I think she’s going to do,” added Susan.

“I would if it wouldn’t make me a liar, but she said she wanted to humiliate and torture Malfoy before killing him and I think this might do it but still...” said Luna. “It’ll be like a train wreck, it’s horrible and gruesome, but somehow you can’t look away.”

“I assumed this was supposed to be torture to Malfoy, not to us,” said Neville.

“I just hope she doesn’t go too far with this,” said Harry.

“Yes, we don’t want to traumatize the younger members for life,” said Ginny.

“I was talking about traumatizing me,” responded Harry, but Ginny just smiled, before she wrapped her arms around Harry, kissing him on the cheek.

“I’m sure we can think of something to get your mind off of the graphic, unfortunate images you’re about to see,” said Ginny, as she and Harry snuggled closely, but they kept an eye on Malfoy who was ranting but had been struck silent.

“Finally, I’ve been waiting for someone to do that to that little twerp for years,” said Daphne as they continued to watch the battle. Astoria had magically tore Malfoy’s robes.

“If you have weak stomachs, I’d advise you to cover your eyes, before it’s too late,” remarked Lily from the back of the room.

“I would but I kind of want to watch this, it’s out of a morbid sense to see what happens,” said Harry.

“I’m with Harry,” said Ginny.

They continued to watch as Draco’s robes were completely shredded, revealing a lot of pale, pasty, quite frankly un-toned flesh that was not a pretty sight to look at. Some of the girls, who grudgingly admitted that Draco might be slightly good looking, had turned away in disgust to see what Draco looked like underneath those robes and the results were not pretty. Draco was stripped to a pair of pink boxer shorts with red hearts on them.

“You know, I don’t make a habit of picturing Draco Malfoy in his underwear but somehow, if I did, that would be exactly what I pictured him wearing,” said Susan.

“Better than picturing him wearing nothing,” remarked Luna as several people looked recoiled in disgust but just in time to see Astoria bring her shoe, which had been transfigured into a high heel, right down onto the crotch of Draco, who recoiled in obvious pain and agony.

“Well, I’ll be damned, Draco has a set after all,” remarked Harry which caused several people to laugh as they had a feeling Astoria might wrap this up sooner or later.

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Astoria stood over Draco, he was stripped to his underwear which was soaked with blood, not to mention the blood dripping down his face and Draco looked outraged, along with being slightly upset. No one did that to a Malfoy and got away with him.

"Here's the thing Malfoy, that even you couldn't miss, you never would have had a chance had you fought Harry today, he would have just thrown one curse, at you and it would have been lights out for good," concluded Astoria in a firm voice, as she raised her wand. "I could place the Cruciatus Curse on you, to make you feel what I felt but that just shows poor originality to use such an overplayed curse. Perhaps this curse is more intriguing, it will force you to relieve your worst enemies, it was something based off of the effects of the Dementors and now I'm going to see what one makes you cry like the little girl you are."

A light struck Draco right in the eyes and if he could move, his arms and legs would twitch painful. Right now, it was much worse, as he could not move to attempt to do something to stop the pain. He saw memories flash through his mind, one by one, most of them humiliations that Potter had something to do with, but also his father dressing him down repeatedly in front of his pureblood friends, for doing worse in the exams than a Mudblood. Being turned into a ferret also was prominent but the faces of Potter and his friends were laughing at him, taunting him. The outrage of Potter basically considering himself to be lower than a Weasley was obvious as well and it played on Draco's mind. Astoria removed the silencing charm from Draco as he shrieked in agony.

"Make it stop, please, make it stop, I don't deserve this," said Draco, almost sobbing. It would be funny if it was not so pathetically sad.

"You do deserve this, Malfoy, hell, this is better than you deserve, but you will die soon with one thing obvious, that no matter what, you never lived an entire day of your life without being better than Harry," answered Astoria.

"He's nothing, he can't he fight me," said Draco briefly before more memories punished him.

"I've washed my hands cleanly of you for good now, Malfoy, I hate you, I hope wherever you go after you die, it is filled with nothing but eternal pain and suffering," said Astoria in a venomous voice as she looked at Malfoy's eyes, bloodshot and his face covered in cuts.

“One more thing, before you finish it Astoria, I have to say this to our little captive ferret,” echoed Harry’s voice. “You were right one time and that was that I did kill your father. And you will never have any satisfaction of avenging his death. Take that to the grave with you, Draco.”

Draco could not respond, he fell to the side, unable to move but if he could, he would be rolled up into a ball, sobbing, and sucking his thumb, the barrage of unfriendly memories that had been amplified had reduced him to this state. The once proud pureblood had been humbled.

“Hurts doesn’t it, to be miserable,” stated Astoria as she looked at Draco. “I don’t want to spend too much time dealing with you, enough of my life has been consumed with thoughts about you. Just know this that you will be passing through some dragon’s digestive system by tomorrow morning. I’d hate to give the poor thing indigestion but such is life.”

Draco looked up but a curse struck him right in the heart. He felt his body slowly and rather painfully shut down. The shrieks that came from his body could be heard for quite the distance. After a moment, Draco was abruptly silenced and Astoria walked over, to ensure he was dead.

“Dobby!” called Harry from the other room. “There is a mess that needs to be cleaned up in the lobby, could you get on that right away?”

“Right away, Harry Potter, sir,” responded Dobby as he arrived with a pop as Astoria backed off. Dobby looked at the body of his former young master frowning. “Sir is being right when he says this is a mess but Dobby will take it away, Harry Potter sir.”

Astoria entered the next room, to rejoin the D.A., hoping for some feedback on what to improve but just as she passed, a loud alarm echoed throughout Diagon Alley.

“Potter!” shouted the voice of Severus Snape. “Open up the bank or face our wrath.”

“They’re joking right?” asked Ginny.

“I don’t think so,” said Harry.

“Looks like there are Death Eaters, along with Dementors, giants, and trolls as well, along with some coerced people from the Ministry, I’d imagine” commented Luna. “This might not be pretty.”

“And Voldemort’s not out there, crafty bastard’s probably waiting for his forces to weaken us,” said Harry as he looked as several spells bombarded the front entrance of the bank.

The true test of their defenses around the bank was about to begin, along with their ability to hold the bank. Given the fact that it appeared that giants were pounding on their door, they might be in danger of the defenses collapsing long enough for the Death Eaters to get inside.

“Everyone mobilize and get ready to fight, if they want a battle, we’ll give them a bloodbath,” said Harry, as everyone prepared for another big battle.

And that’s the end of Chapter Forty Eight. Chapter Forty Nine to come this weekend, barring any unforeseen circumstances that delay it.

Chapter Forty Nine: Misfire.

Snape was outside the bank. To say this was going to need all of his cunning would be an understatement. The Dark Lord had been incensed with Potter's arrogance and thus had endeavored to keep him busy with young Draco Malfoy, while he gathered together a force to storm the bank. The Ministry officials, who were under the watchful eye of what few senior Death Eaters that remained, shook, as they tried to hold their wands steady. The giants looked vicious and surly as usual. The Dementors hovered around the bank, everyone putting as much distance between them and the Dementors as possible. Also the Dark Lord had gathered together a number of trolls, who ran their hands across their clubs before they raised it. Half of the remaining Death Eaters were there and Snape had hoped that Potter and his friends had the sense to find a way to escape from the bank because there would be no way they could overcome these odds. In fact, even Dumbledore would have had trouble against these odds had he been alive. Snape's recent conversations with the painting of Dumbledore had revealed that much. The former Headmaster all but admitted that the only reason why he had not been killed was because he remained a step ahead of pretty much everyone else and had enough information to manipulate the circumstances to his control.

"Potter!" shouted Rodolphus Lestrangle suddenly. "Perhaps you didn't here Snape, you better open up now, you filthy half blood, or we will break down the doors and slaughter you along with whatever blood traitors and Mudbloods you have inside that bank."

"Why don't you try and break in here?" asked a voice that Snape just did a double take out but he shook his head. His mind had to be playing tricks on him, she was dead but he recovered quickly, it was unwise to look weak in front of a group of Death Eaters would take advantage of everything.

"Yes, you Death Eaters are prone to accidents, so if you don't back away now, you might actually live to pucker up and kiss your Master's backside another day," said Harry, as the giants began to pound on the bank more viciously but it had been reinforced slightly.

“Blast down the doors,” said Snape in a resigned voice but several spells struck the doors, still nothing had even dented them. Giants pounded on the building, trolls pounded on the building, and even the Dementors appeared to be reluctant to attempt to find a way though. “Potter, if you have any sense you would leave the bank and surrender or face the full wrath of the Dark Lord.”

“I don’t see Riddle out there,” responded Harry in a taunting voice.

“Perhaps Tom doesn’t want a piece of Harry after what happened last time,” remarked Ginny from inside the bank.

“You mean the time where he had Voldemort on the disadvantage but let him go out of the kindness of his heart,” continued Luna.

“Yes, that time, but Voldemort has the Ministry and we have Gringotts, that seems to be fair, the government’s pretty much useless without any money to run it,” said Susan.

“Besides, Harry, says that he’s not going to open these doors until Voldemort agrees to his terms and I wonder what would happen if a bunch of people stormed the Ministry when all of you were out here, with your pitiful attempts to open up the doors,” said Daphne.

“Doubt it’d be good, but I think we should let them in, if they really want to be utterly humiliated by the Defense Association Army one more time,” said Neville as several other voices shouted taunts at Death Eaters, it was very hard for them to understand.

“Draco was sent here to fail and he did in the most spectacular way possible,” answered Harry in a bored voice. “What makes you think you won’t be any different?”

“Blow down those doors,” responded Snape in an irritated voice, hoping that a more devastating assault would inspire Potter to take his little gang of misfits and move on elsewhere. Otherwise all way lost. Several more spells shot towards the bank and while the bank walls were rocked, nothing seemed to break though.

“I hear you knocking but you can’t come in,” taunted Harry. “Seriously, if this is who Voldemort expects to help him enforce his little authority, then there will be rebellion by this afternoon.”

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Inside the bank, the D.A. and their allies were divided into teams, as the defenses did a remarkable job of holding. Still Harry sensed an opportunity to finish off the Dementors, along with dealing a deadly blow to the giants and finishing off some more Death Eaters.

“You’re going to let them in, right Harry?” asked Lily, who envisioned Snape’s grisly demise after what he had done. If reality matched up with her vision, it would be great.

“Of course I am but I need to make them sweat a bit first and magically wear themselves out slightly, besides it is a nice opportunity to test how well our protections can hold up,” said Harry as he watched the other leaders, divide everyone into groups, so they could go to area of the bank where they could control separate defensive measures. Harry moved over to Fred and George. “You said you had something that might work on the giants that would penetrate their skin. Please tell me you have it with you.”

“Actually Harry, we do, it took us months and months of testing but we got it ready, a dart containing a modified shrinking solution,” said Fred as he handed it out.

“Be careful with that thing Harry, it can puncture through concrete and I don’t want to have to explain to Ginny that her boyfriend shrank to microscopic size,” said Fred as Harry carefully took the dart.

“As you no doubt guessed by Fred’s words, we tested it on concrete and it worked,” responded Fred. “A building to be precise, we took it into London at night, found the tallest unoccupied building we could, made sure no one was around and shot it right in the building.”

“Then it shrank to the size of a marble, where we administered the antidote and no side effects,” said George.

“Considering the skin of giants is about as concrete that should work out pretty good” said Harry in a confident voice, as he carefully handed George the dart back. “Both of you be ready, since you created the merchandise and there is very little time for me to learn it so..”

“Say no more Harry, we’ll keep an eye out for any giants who might be easy targets,” said Fred.

“Mind you, giants aren’t too hard to miss,” responded George as the twins nodded their head, before they took the back with a few of the enhanced shrinking solution darts. In his head, the idea sounded absurd but if it worked, Harry was not about to complain. He turned, where the leaders were nearly finished dividing up their members in groups to control different defenses around the bank.

“Alright, Daphne, Susan, Neville, Luna, Ginny, all of you are with me, the Dementors are what they’re likely to send in first, something that they’re going to live to regret,” said Harry before he paused. “Well they would regret it if I allowed them to live...”

“To the lobby then, to get ready to strike the Dementors the second that enter the bank,” said Ginny and Harry nodded before the six leaders walked out, calmly ready, as a group moved forward. Astoria decided to take up the charge as the leader, because she doubted few would complain.

“Alright, let’s give them a little message on what’s to come if they should get inside, a group of them are standing right near the patch of ground with Devil’s Snare underneath,” commented Astoria, as the eyes of the D.A members got wide at this, before she moved over, tapping her wand towards a stone that was blue. It glowed bright red, just like Luna told them when she had talked to them about this particular defensive measure.

“No luck yet,” grumbled one of the Death Eaters.

“I don’t know why we just don’t stop, it’s not like we’re going to get in any time soon at this rate,” responded a Ministry official, but Rodolphus turned to him, a threatening glint in his eye and wand near his threat.

“You stop when we tell you to stop, we will get inside, the Dark Lord can’t be failed, not this time,” said Rodolphus as he turned to them. “Now put everything into it, blast it, don’t use your feeble little Ministry approved spells, they won’t work. Throw something that as a potential to level the entire building.”

“If the giants can’t break down the door, I don’t see how we can,” grumbled another Ministry official but suddenly several vines poked from the ground, catching the entire group off guard. Several Death Eaters moved but others were unfortunately. Devil’s Snare wrapped around the Death Eaters, the vines continued to snake around them, cutting off their supply of oxygen. They panicked and arms twitched, which only caused the vines to crush them quicker.

“What are you waiting for? Blast it with fire, you fools!” demanded Snape, rolling his eyes as some of these people were more inept than his first year Potions students and that was saying a lot. Suddenly, several blasts of fire shot but it was too late for some. Many had passed out but others had met a grisly fate, being crushed with the deadly vines. They dropped to the ground, as the vines retreated back underneath the ground, as several more staggered backwards, moving as far away from that area as possible.

“His using the old goblin defenses,” remarked a Ministry official that was knowledgeable on the subject.

“That helps us very little, how do you deactivate them?” asked Rodolphus.

“I don’t know,” said the official in a hopeless voice which caused the dangerous Death Eater to round on him.

“What do you mean you don’t know?” demanded Rodolphus.

“I mean exactly what I said, I don’t know,” responded the Ministry official, aware that the wand was inches away from his throat. “The goblins changed them so often, we tried to keep track of them, but it was just hard, they might have deliberately leaked false information out, you know how they are.”

“Rodolphus, the Dark Lord requires as many bodies as possible to throw at this problem, so lower your wand if you please,” answered Severus but several Dementors hovered closely and Snape fixed his eyes on them. “I would have assumed you would have found a way in by now.”

There was no response, not that Snape had expected one from the Dementors. They had no way to communicate with humans. Still Snape turned, so far the constant barrage of spells, along with the attacks of the giants and trolls only shook the bank slightly. The defenses had reinforced the building and if Snape did not know any better, Potter had somehow found a way to improve them.

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“Still trying to get though, soon enough they will but perhaps they should be sent a little message to try and soften them up,” remarked Ginny and Harry nodded.

“Release two of the security dragons, we’ll see how well trained they are,” remarked Harry to Luna and Neville, who nodded, before they walked into the next room to send the orders.

“That one almost cracked the glass,” muttered Susan.

“I know, they’re just getting madder,” said Daphne.

“And more exhausted too, they are expending their magic, trust me, I do have a plan,” answered Harry as he looked outside. Fatigue had begun to set in on some cases, not to mention those Death Eaters

who had met their untimely demise because of the Devil's Snare. A fist of the giant rocked the lobby slightly, but a loud pained grunt indicated that the large magical creature suffered discomfort. Harry spotted the ugly face of a troll on the outside of the bank as its club clashed against the bank again and again, but no dice. Luna and Neville returned.

"I wonder how long will it take for them to realize that all of their efforts are useless, all it will take is an unlocking spell to open the doors," remarked Luna.

"Never, which is the beauty of it," said Ginny, looking at Harry. It was one of his better ideas and that was saying a lot.

"Yes, we've had protections placed for every major attack and the most obvious one is left unprotected, quite genius if I do say so myself," said Harry.

"You just did," responded Luna.

"If you had told me to protect from everything but an unlocking spell a year ago, I would have called you crazy, but now, considering what I've learned, it's actually a pretty brilliant idea," said Susan.

"Yes, sometimes the best answer is the simplest, something that our society is constantly failed to learn," commented Luna as she looked outside, the dragons had arrived, as the leaders prepared in case the Dementors had found their way inside. Unless he had made a gross error in his calculations, these were the last Dementors.

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"DRAGONS!" shouted one of the Ministry officials losing their head, as two of them appeared above them, their jaws open, baring their fangs and fire breathed from high above, causing the figures around the bank to spread, except for the Dementors who just stood there, the air filled with the cold and the mist as normally for them.

“Yes, we can see that, send water spells and freezing charms up there, we’ll see what we can do to slow them down long enough to divert them back to the bank,” said Snape but suddenly a dragon spun around, whipping its spiked tail. It smashed right into the face of the giant, ripping into it. The beast gave a pained bellow as blood splashed down to the ground before. The giant rushed forward the dragon, nearly tramping several Death Eaters in the process, before he grabbed it but the second dragon breathed fire onto its back. The giant shrieked it as another giant moved over, swiping at the dragon but the dragon’s spiked tail impacted the hand of the giant.

“Get this mess under control, before they wreck half of Diagon Alley and kill us all!” shouted Snape in a slightly frantic voice, none of this was going to plan, the battle between the giants and the dragons had gone back and forth. Several spells shut up into the air but they only served to aggravate both magical creatures. All attempts to open the doors of Gringotts were lost as they attempted to weather the storm from below, as the chaotic scene continued.

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“Everyone is in position, good, get ready, because they might be let in a couple of minutes,” said Harry, as he had sent Daphne, Susan, and Luna down the hallway to check on some things, leaving him, Ginny, and Neville in the lobby, watching the scenes of battle outside, including the chaos he had caused by sending two dragons out, they went right after the giants or the giants went right after them. It was quite difficult to tell from their vantage point.

“I really think we should let them sweat it out a little bit more,” remarked Ginny, as she watched a group of Ministry officials nearly get barbequed outside of the building. Diagon Alley was rapidly turning into a blazing inferno, with blood in the streets.

“So this is there plan?” asked Neville.

“No, Voldemort’s plan was to have them storm the bank and slaughter as many of us as possible, while coming in at the last minute to finish me off when I was bloodied and beaten,” remarked

Harry in a serious tone of voice. "That was the plan but he neglected to realize that I might have something to say about them getting in the bank."

"Good thing Snape got out the way, Lily would have been upset," said Ginny, as sure enough, Snape nearly got fried to a crisp.

"Yeah, those grease fires are hard to put out," said Neville, as Daphne, Susan, and Luna returned after making some last minute preparations in properly coordinating the defenses of Gringotts. This would be a slightly different battle than the one against the goblins and thus, it needed to be structured in a different way.

"Everything is ready," responded Susan and Harry, nodded, as he prepared to arrange the entrance of the Death Eaters, perhaps a time after it would have done them any good.

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"We managed to get one!" shouted one of the Death Eaters and sure enough, one of dragon had been blasted, landing hard on the ground at an awkward angle, snapping his neck when it fell. More spells were sent and a black light shot right into the opened mouth one of one of the dragons. The giant clubbed it out of the ground and two of them grabbed the dragon.

A rip indicated the dragon was torn in half by two giants pulling it in either direction. A shower of dragon blood rained down on the death eaters as the giants tossed the carcass down on the ground.

"We've got it open, Severus," said a Death Eater calmly and sure enough, the door clicked open, revealing their entry to the bank and Snape turned to the Dementors, before giving them a nod. As the Dark Lord had requested, the Dementors were to be sent in first. The glided into the bank, if Snape did not know any better, he sensed some reluctance, a feeling of dread or at least something similar to what would be felt by Dementors, as they glided into the bank.

“Potter, you better have found a way out in time, because I will be unable to save you without giving my position up,” muttered Snape in a nearly inaudible tone to himself, as the Dementors entered the bank lobby and several bright shapes rose up to face them. The group outside of the Ministry stepped back, hands over their eyes, blinded by the light. It was difficult to make out as the Dementors attempted to glide back but were frozen in place almost. Snape squinted his eyes, seeing six figures from the other end of the lobby and several shapes charging the Dementors. He could not look for long, the light was positively blinding and from his vantage point it was difficult to make it out.

The Dementors tried to get away but found themselves trapped without a place to go. If Dementors ever showed fear, this would be it. It was the light that consumed them, the downfall that consumed their brothers, it was back to claim them and drag them into an overwhelming cloud of purity. The Dementors were ripped to shreds as several of the Death Eaters stepped forward, watching, along with the Ministry officials and even the trolls stopped to stare. Bright light ripped through the Dementors, in a number of colors, shredding their cloaks and those watching got a brief glimpse of what was under the cloaks of the Dementors. Needless to say it was not pretty.

“What should we do?” asked one of the Ministry officials but a few Death Eaters stepped a little too close as the Dementors burst, releasing their essence into oblivion. The Death Eaters were caught by them, the mists striking into them at such a force was similar to being given the Dementor’s Kiss as it ripped their souls painfully from their body, before it disappeared into oblivion along with several other tortured and tormented souls. The crowd of Death Eaters went in a hush but several screams from outside had caused them to turn around.

“What is it now?” grumbled Snape in a very irritated and surly tone of voice as he looked at them.

“The giants, they just vanished, they’re gone, disappeared,” said one of the Death Eaters in a hushed voice and sure enough, the giants had disappeared. Several of the Ministry officials backed off, it

was not worth it, wondering why they had thought it was a good idea to go into work for the Ministry, but the Death Eaters moved forward. They had sent dangerous looking spells into the air, to stop the Ministry officials.

“No one leaves until the bank is reclaimed for Lord Voldemort,” said a female Death Eater pointing her wand dangerously. “You will go inside, with the trolls, while we remain on the outside, to make sure there are no more surprises that await us on the inside.”

The Ministry people walked in, legs feeling like concrete as they stepped forward, inside the Ministry building, shaking slightly, really wishing they had stayed in bed the day Voldemort took control. Not many of them were fighters. They stepped inside Gringotts.

“Potter, you better surrender, You-Know-Who won’t like it if you don’t,” said one of the Ministry officials in a pathetic voice but they walked down the hallway, moving forward, rather shakily and quite reluctantly as they stepped inside but in an instant, the doors swung open. Before the Ministry officials could react, several stunning spells caught them. The few people who knew how to fight were overwhelmed and those who did not, were put down easily.

“Put them in one of the chambers, until we figure out who is being blackmailed into coming here and who supports Voldemort,” said Susan, as she and Daphne lead their group down, as they rounded up the Ministry officials one by one. Word from the other group was getting back that the giants were taken care of and they knew the Dementors were. All that left was the trolls and the Death Eaters would be forced to fight their own battles.

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“As you no doubt have guessed by now, the Dementors have been defeated, the giants have been shrunk down to a microscopic size, and the Ministry officials you sent in to do your dirty work, they are enjoying a stay in our chambers, until we figure out where their loyalties truly lie,” said Harry. “I’ll give you two choices; you can turn back now and tell Riddle that I’m about out of patience with him. I was

willing to give him a chance to fight me face up but now I'm not particular about how he meets his final defeat. If I have to blow up the Ministry with him inside, I'll find a way to do so. Your other choice is come in here and face a similar fate that many other Death Eaters have recently. I have a one hundred percent success rate against anyone who I wanted to die, while there is always the chance that some of my people will die, all of yours may. It is a risk I believe everyone who is with me is willing to take."

The taunting voice of Harry Potter paused before he continued.

"The choice is yours, it is just a few more days of life versus a few more minutes, pick your poison," said Harry calmly.

"Send in the trolls," said Snape in a calm voice, as while Potter had managed to get lucky enough to defeat another troll but he had help. Now he hoped it would be enough to deter Potter and have him evacuate before it was too late.

"Very well, inside now," ordered Rodolphus in a surly voice, as he ushered the trolls inside. "Smash those little annoyances to pieces."

"Yes, smash," grunted one of the trolls as he raised the club before he bashed it on the ground. The trolls slowly walked in the bank, but concealed in the shadows, a group of D.A. members, with Luna and Neville in the lead stood. Luna smiled, this plan of hers would work as they held the wands at the ready.

The clubs were levitated in the air and naturally the trolls were confused momentarily, looking at their clubs. In an instant, they were transfigured into large heavy anvils with the word "ACME" stamped on the side. The levitation was cancelled and the anvils smashed down onto the trolls heads with a loud crush. They did not suffer any brain damage, but their skulls were crushed and they died instantly.

"Well, that was fun, everyone get in position for the next attack," commented Luna, as the D.A nodded, before they got ready.

“So the trolls are the best you can send,” said Harry.

“That’s just sad, the Death Eaters, the so called elite followers of Lord Voldemort, can’t fight their own battles,” commented Ginny.

“Yes, it is sad, but it’s to be expected, anyone who follows a half blood psychopath who hates the world because Daddy abandoned him can be a rather pathetic lot,” said Harry’s voice which caused Snape to wince. He was just as bad as Draco, making the wrong comments at the wrong times, but at the same time, it appeared that Potter was baiting them on purpose. Surely the boy’s arrogance could not have reached such heights.

“You think of us as pathetic Potter,” said one of the followers viciously.

“We’ll show you when we tear through all of your friends and then bring your mangled body to the Dark Lord, to extract his last breath,” added Rodolphus Lestrange as he stepped forward, turning to the Death Eaters. “We’ll going in now; we’re going to make Potter eat his words.”

Snape looked at them, before he nodded. To do anything else would reveal his status of being a double agent and Rodolphus was the type to kill first and ask questions never. There was a reason that he married Bellatrix, they were equally insane, even though Bellatrix took it to a new disturbing level. The Death Eaters walked inside, the doors remained open. Some of them were amused that Potter had not closed the doors, but it just show what a fool he was. Now they would make him pay.

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“They took the bait,” said Harry.

“Good, if I know Severus, he is going to try and help in his own way, almost expecting you to forgive him,” said Lily. “I wonder if he recognized my voice.”

“He might have but we’ll find out right away,” said Ginny.

“Yes, knowing him, he would have chalked it up to his mind playing tricks on him,” said Harry as a message was sent to him, in code. “The other groups are ready, I’d like to wrap this up sooner rather than later and then I have a plan that will force Voldemort to fight me.”

“You can tell us on the way,” said Ginny, as she and Harry walked into the battle, hand in hand, the Elder Wand along with the other two Hallows close to them as Lily pulled the hood up, concealing her face. She would relieve her face to Snape when she was killing him for the most dramatic effect possible.

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“Show yourself Potter!” demanded one of the Death Eaters in a disgusted tone of voice and he threw an organ explosion curse at a moving object. It turned out to only be a rat as it burst into a shower of blood.

“The brat has to be around her somewhere, we’ll find him, even if we have to bring the bank to the ground,” commented Rodolphus but spells shot from several directions, causing the Death Eaters to move into a defensive stance. However, the spells stopped coming at them for about a minute. That was until another barrage of spells was aimed at them, once again causing the Death Eaters to be at a disadvantage. They were not used to fighting in such a manner, but as several of them dropped to the ground. Snape casually deflected a few spells off of the side, inadvertently striking some of his fellow Death Eaters.

More dropped from the ground, a few of them suffering more grisly and graphic fates than others. Snape dodged as the blood of a Death Eater nearby oozed out of his chest like a geyser from the impact of the curse. Ducking another attack, several of the Death Eaters screamed. Their heads felt like they were on fire. It was almost like the inside of their skull along with their brain had spontaneously

combusted on the inside. They fell to the ground, as the Death Eaters huddled together, throwing their spells at them.

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Several of the D.A. members snickered, as they kept moving around from various points, concealed, never staying in the same position at once. It broke every single rule of pureblood dueling etiquette imaginable which made it the perfect way to outmaneuver the Death Eaters. Some of their tactics were dirty and quite frankly underhanded, but the Death Eaters would be the same way if the positions had been reversed. Live by the sword, die by the sword.

Neville in particular was pleased, as he had already taken out Rabastan Lestrage with a curse that would cause his nervous system to overload with an abundance of magical stimulate, basically frying his brain to a crisp. It was a much more painful way to go out than prolonged torture over the Cruciatus Curse. He and Luna helped lead their group, as they maneuvered Rodolphus into the kill.

Death Eaters continued to drop like flies one by one, blood splattering on the ground as they continued to drop. Some of them screamed in pure agony as green fire barbequed their bodies, burning right through their skin and leaving their bones to nothing but dust.

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“Perhaps it might be a better idea to retreat because...” said one of the Death Eaters but Rodolphus had sent a Killing Curse right at him.

“No, we do not cower when the Dark Lord gives us a mission,” said Rodolphus as Snape looked at him. With Death Eaters dropping like flies, it was perhaps not the best idea to kill one of their own in the heat of battle.

Sadly, Rodolphus did not live long enough to learn that lesson, as a spell struck him in the back, transfiguring his spinal cord to jelly. Lethal poisonous jelly that flowed throughout his body, saturating his

internal organs, including his brain, as it slowly melted them in the most painful way possible.

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“They’re retreating,” said Daphne as sure enough, the remaining seven or eight, maybe nine at most Death Eaters that remained had rushed out, now that the Lestrangle Brothers were finished, there were no real fanatic followers who remained there.

“What should we do Harry?” asked Astoria.

“Let them leave,” answered Ginny for Harry.

“Yes, Ginny’s right, they won’t get far for long,” said Harry as he watched the cowards depart, signaling for his army to cease firing spells. “We have bigger fish to fry.”

“Look at Snape, he’s not leaving just yet,” said Susan.

“Does he really think he could defeat all of us?” asked Neville.

“No, it looks like he might be trying to explain himself,” said Luna.

“Not that would be much better, when I’m done with him,” responded Lily as she got in position, she had been waiting for this moment for almost sixteen years, she refused to wait another second.

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“Listen here Potter, you may not believe me, but I did not betray Dumbledore, in fact...” stated Snape in a soft voice but he was blasted by an orange light. It struck him in the chest, knocking him to the ground. His wand arm shattered on impact and a hooded figure walked forward. “Listen here you arrogant boy...”

“I’m neither arrogant nor a boy, but if you make one more snide remark about Harry, I’ll rip your tongue out and strangle you with it,”

said Lily as she lowered her hood, her green eyes looking at Snape and Snape looked shocked.

“No, you can’t be alive, the Dark Lord killed you,” said Snape in a shocked voice as he stepped back but something in his gut told him that this was the genuine article. “How did you...”

“Get resurrected from the dead so young, well there is a reason for that, because the ritual required Harry and Ginny to bring me back from the dead, sixteen appeared to be the best age for me to come back, without the most potential magical backlash from the ritual,” said Lily with a smirk. “Not that it didn’t have its share of problems, knocking out the Floo Network and causing Voldemort to suffer a setback in his little Taboo efforts. A stupid idea I might add, because all it would take was for someone to say his name and draw a bunch of his followers into an ambush to pick them apart one by one.”

Lily just paused before she looked at Snape.

“Enough small talk, get on your feet and fight me, Severus,” commanded Lily and Snape shook his head.

“Look, Lily, I don’t want to do this I’m....” stated Snape pausing as if it pained him to say his next words. “I’m sorry for leading Voldemort to kill you...”

“Don’t you play dumb with me, you knew what was happening when you lead Riddle, you wanted him to kill James and Harry, because you thought you could have me all to yourself,” said Lily as she stepped forward, sparks flying from her wand. “Killing my husband, that is to be expected, I don’t have a doubt in my mind that James would have wanted to kill you if he had the chance most days. The only reason he saved you when you stuck your nose where it didn’t belong was for Remus’s sake and not yours. However, willingly knowing that he would kill my son, that’s where you just crossed a line where I could never forgive you. Then you dare say that I’m sorry. Well I’m sorry too. I’m sorry that I ever thought you were a decent person.”

Lily sent a black curse right at Snape and Snape just blocked it. He refused to fight back, this was insane, surely she should have understood. Two more curses were sent at Snape.

“Fight me, Snape!” shouted Lily angrily and Snape refused, despite the fact that some of those curses were dangerous, proving that Lily hated him.

“No, I won’t, your son needs to know some information...” stated Snape.

“About the Horcruxes, or about the fact that he has a Horcrux inside him, something that Dumbledore neglected to tell him?” asked Lily and Snape was caught off guard, knocked into the wall, struggling to breath. “Yes, we know that, everything’s been taken care of and I’m sure you thought the scheme you cooked up with Dumbledore was brilliant. Well, Harry outsmarted both of you, because he killed Dumbledore just like I’m going to kill you.”

“Lily, I would have...why did you...why did it have to come to this?” asked Snape. “We were friends, I made a mistake, you should be able to forgive me...”

“You sound just about as bad as Granger and you’re pissing me off as nearly much as she had with her attitude,” said Lily with fire in her eyes as Snape was ripped to shreds by his own Sectumsempra Curse. Blood oozed out of Snape’s body, covered in cuts “Read my lips, I hate you. AVADA KEDAVRA!”

Snape was struck by the curse; Lily was the last person he thought would ever resort to using an Unforgiveable Curse. The last thing he saw was her eyes reflecting so much hatred and venom directed towards him than he did Potter. Suddenly Snape dropped to the ground, dead as blood continued to drip from his mangled body.

“May you rot, Snape,” said Lily, feeling no remorse for what she did. She walked over, looking at Snape and turned to Harry, who stepped out and nodded. She rolled back Snape’s arm, making a face at having to touch Snape’s flesh, before she touched it, activating the

dark mark to signal Voldemort there for one final duel to the death with Harry.

And that's the end of the chapter. Let the cliffhanger related trauma begin.

I can feel this story winding to a near close within a few (five or six, maybe slightly more but unlikely to be less) chapters and while I had fun writing it, it will be rather liberating to finish it. Especially considering the fact that while there are countless stories written, only a small fraction of them had been completed, especially one's that go this long.

(Now, with that said, anyone want to take odds of me getting struck down by lightning or abducted by aliens or something just as I'm about to wrap up the final sentence of the last chapter of the story.)

Harry Potter versus Lord Voldemort, one more time. One last time, a duel until no one is left standing. The world will never be the same ever again. Chapter Fifty, sometime next week.

Chapter Fifty: Collapse

Voldemort sat in the Minister, awaiting word from Severus that Potter would be in position for the final blow. He looked at the wall, a smile creeping onto his face. Anyone who had been in his presence would have been rather terrified by the expression on Voldemort's face. Gringotts would have fallen by now and his followers would be inside the bank, ready to eliminate whatever pitiful existence that Potter managed to trick into following him. He could sense the blood and the corpses that would await him, it would be glorious and then he would beat Potter, with his last dying breath, the boy would realize that he was a failure to the world and his friends. Then the world will submit to Lord Voldemort when they realized their last hope would be defeated. It was a great moment each and every second it played out in mind of his victory.

The time for planning was done as Voldemort sensed Severus summoning him. He rose from the chair he sat in, a twisted expression on his face as he stood towards the door before he disappeared right to Gringotts.

Soon, the thorn that was Harry Potter would be removed from his side for good.

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Harry sat in the lobby of Gringotts, Voldemort had just been summoned, he would arrive at any moment but he was ready. A number of thoughts were going through the head of the Boy-Who-Lived. Everything he had prepared for recently had just come down to this. It would be do or die. There was no turning back now, he had to defeat Voldemort or else, regardless of the cost. He had a strategy but plans tended to go wrong at the worst possible time. As he looked down at the body of Snape, one of the many who had to pay the price for joining up with Voldemort, Harry expressed a few doubts mentally, but vowed not to show them. He knew Voldemort's Achilles heel and it was that his ego always insisted that he be better than anyone else. He thrived on fear and hopelessness. Take that away and all one had was an above average wizard, not the demonic dark god that the world thought Voldemort to be. Harry saw Voldemort for what he

was and that was a wizard. A powerful wizard that had slaughtered countless in the name of blood purity yes, but just a wizard and Harry felt he was just as good as Voldemort, providing there were no distractions like worrying about followers taking a shot at him or people around him getting hurt.

Now with all the distractions removed, it was gut check time. Harry knew the score, he had to dig down deeper than he ever managed before in his life. The other battles against Voldemort were never meant to come to a conclusion due to a variety of factors. Now with the Horcruxes out of the picture, they were on equal mortality and nearly equal skill. Harry had advantages that Voldemort did not and the same most certainly held true the other way around.

Harry had to win. There was no if about it. He had to defeat Voldemort, no matter what it took. And it would take a lot, more than Harry could muster. The others had been moved down to a lower level, under the most protective enchantments possible. The end was here, Harry Potter against Lord Voldemort.

And it was time for Harry to fight as Voldemort appeared outside of the bank. The Boy-Who-Lived stood in the lobby, his regular wand in one hand and the Elder Wand up his sleeve. He would not use the Elder Wand unless it was absolutely necessary; to prove a point and that he could defeat Voldemort even without the unbeatable wand at his disposal.

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Voldemort dropped down outside of the Gringotts bank and stepped forward, without bothering to even look. The doors were opened so he walked inside where he found himself face to face with a Harry Potter who was not beaten at all. Rather he looked fresh and ready to fight. Voldemort stood, facing off against Harry.

“I see you got my message, Riddle,” commented Harry in a light hearted tone as Voldemort stood, not saying anything, but the deadly glare in his eyes was evident. “Nice of you to come by but now that you’re here, I’m afraid you’re not going to be allowed to leave.”

“Potter, you defeated my Death Eaters and then you summon me here, by pressing the mark of one of my followers, when you had a perfect opportunity to leave the country with your traitorous friends and even I would not have been the wiser,” commented Voldemort in a cold voice as he looked at Harry. “The question I want answered is what kind of fool are you do to something like that?”

“The kind that will defeat you one more time,” said Harry as he looked at Voldemort, not blinking, he looked right in the eye of his enemy, almost begging him to make the first move, to give him any excuse. “So once again, I extend the challenge that you cowardly declined yesterday. I, Harry James Potter, challenge you, Tom Marvolo Riddle to a duel to the death, a duel where there is only one person left standing. Will you remove the yellow streak from your back long enough to accept that challenge?”

Voldemort looked at Harry, seconds slowly ticked by as Voldemort stared at Harry. Harry stared back, not backing down, he refused to show even one bit of weakness in the face of Lord Voldemort. Voldemort calmly took a breath, before he addressed Harry’s challenge, he would refuse to let this brat show him up.

“Potter, you forced the issue, with your games and your defiance, you might have slaughtered many of my followers today,” said Voldemort as his eyes scanned the bodies on the ground in an indifferent manner before he faced Harry. “But one thing is for certain, each and every one of your duels, as you rightfully pointed out, ended before they could come to a decisive conclusion due to circumstances. This one will only end by death and it won’t be mine, Potter, you can be certain of that fact. So to make matters short, yes I accept your challenge but remember as you draw in your last breath you forced the issue. Your demise will be slow and painful as the realization of your failure fully sets in.”

“We’ll see Riddle,” replied Harry as he got ready, neither wizard wanting to make a mistake too soon and making the first move would be something that could lead to mistakes. “I would say bow but it would be an insult to both of us so let’s waste no more time with small talk and duel.”

“Yes, Potter, we shall,” said Voldemort as he aimed his wand and quickly threw an attack at Harry. “AVADA KEDAVRA!”

The green light sped at Harry as Voldemort was not wasting any time with games, his promise of a slow death had been a ploy to lead Harry into a false sense of security but he refused to fully take the bait. Harry dodged around the attack, causing it to hit the desk behind him. Voldemort stood as he jabbed his wand. A thick grey light spiraled through the air right towards Harry, but once again another move. The spell struck against the desk blowing it to dust. Harry stood on his feet and slashed his wand towards the air. The spell was fixed to rip right through Voldemort’s skin and puncture his lungs but it was blocked.

“Come on Potter, you wanted this duel,” taunted Voldemort. “You thought you were a powerful wizard but yet you have yet to get one spell in on me.”

“Just wait Riddle, you’ll be eating those words,” responded Harry as he blocked a spiral of black light. The backlash caused a loud explosion to echo throughout the lobby and perhaps all of Diagon Alley. Harry slashed his wrists, sending three more spells, all rather dark in nature at Voldemort. His body felt a warm feeling, at the power that the spells gave him. Voldemort calmly deflected those spells, looking rather bored and un-amused by what Harry had to offer.

“Please Potter, first year I could do those spells, perhaps you’re nothing but a little Gryffindor golden boy and couldn’t handle a true wizard,” stated Voldemort as he threw another attack. Razor sharp daggers wrapped in black flames but Harry calmly flicked his wrist to each side. Each and every dagger was deflected, some back at Voldemort. Voldemort blasted the daggers back to the ground and calmly turned to Harry, venom in his eyes, but a twist of the arm. The Dark Lord was staggered back, as several serpents made of black and green fire were sent right at him. They breathed fire right at him as they charged. Voldemort flicked his wand, attempting to put out the fires of these demonic creations of Potter, but they appeared to

be immune to water. Harry threw himself behind Voldemort and a spell struck him in the back. Crashing to the ground, a loud scream was heard as the fangs burned right into the Dark Lord's arm. He was in pain, as he had two fanged shape burn marks but managed to shove the snakes back. The snakes were rounded into one area and trapped in a green bubble. A modified variety of the bubble headed charm, except without any oxygen.

The lack of oxygen to feed the fires had caused the snakes to disappear, the flames extinguished and Harry did not let up on his assault. One of his spells caught Voldemort right in the chest, his heart rate speeding up. It was a spell that he was able to counter and send one right back at his enemy. Who was not right there, in fact there was a slight illusion spell to project Potter's image in a shadow. Just barely, Voldemort was able to turn around, to deflect a spell. Another attack needed to be deflected by a solid stone shield.

"Getting tired, Tommy?" asked Harry, as he dodged to the side, using the reflexes from years of dueling and Quidditch. It was obvious this was far from over.

"Not at the slightest Potter, I will bring you to your knees and kill you," stated Voldemort as another spell, a large silver ribbon that looked like it could slice anything was aimed towards Harry. He did the only thing that made sense, summoned a nearby chair, blocking it at the last minute, before he positioned his attack. Both wizards sent spells off at each other and both sets of spells collided with each other. A loud crash echoed for quite a distance as both wizards turned, shaken from the backlash of both of their spells but neither was willing to get their opponent any quarter. One attack from Harry was dodged and another attack sent back in turn. Voldemort avoided the impact from that one and both wizards continued to stare each other down, at a stalemate as their duel within Gringotts continued with both wizards going back and forth with their attacks.

Voldemort looked at Potter, despite everything he sent at Potter, there was some kind of counter that Potter had up his sleeve. It was almost like if he knew what the Dark Lord's next attack is. A skull shattering hex was blocked. Voldemort aimed his wand and sent a

corkscrew of black light right at Potter. Had it connected, it would have ripped a hole into Potter's chest and caused his heart to explode. Fortunately for one wizard and unfortunately for another, it was blocked. Voldemort shot a conjured spiked noose right at Potter but a slicing curse countered by ripping it into pieces. After a block of his own on an attempted organ puncture curse, Voldemort aimed a yellow light right at Potter's eyes. Potter dodged the attack and returned fire with several blasts of green fire. Once again, the attack was deflected or just straight countered. Voldemort and Harry stepped face to face with each other, both wizards not taking their eyes off of each other. It was just a matter of who made a crucial mistake that their enemy could take advantage of.

"The sands of time are running out of the reign of the Dark Lord Voldemort, is it not Tom?" asked Harry. "Reflexes are not as pristine as they used to be, time has passed you over, made a mockery out of your abilities. I recall similar statements being made about Dumbledore and they were not far off. The thing is Voldemort, all of your little tricks to gain immortality, they worked well. Perhaps too well as your body depends on those tricks and thus you are a few steps slower...right there, you could have blown my head clean off of my shoulders right when I was talking shortly before, but now it's easily blocked. And again I block it."

"I have all the time in the world to defeat you Potter, for reasons that your simple mind could not fully comprehend," said Voldemort and this point suggested either supreme arrogance or the fact that Voldemort had not realized all of his Horcruxes were gone. A whip of black magical light was sent but once again Harry appeared to have an answer to Voldemort's attack. The attacks continued, each growing more and more deadly. "Perhaps a dose of pain before I send you to your death Potter. CRUCIO."

The curse was avoided, as Harry had a smile on his face. It was almost instinctive, no thought at all to block that one.

"If I had a Sickle for every time you pulled out that curse out when we fought, I would be even richer than I am by now, by the way, eighteen pureblood fortunes before you accepted the challenge," said

Harry. "Granted, I think at least fifteen of those families I completely wiped out when you sent them on their suicide run, but it's the thought that counts. Congratulations Riddle, I should give you a medal for the most incompetent minions...ever!"

"I'll silence you for good Potter," said Voldemort in a frustrated tone. Harry smiled, Voldemort was starting to lose his focus at whatever plan he had and that meant he had stumbled into a trap. At least that's what Harry hoped. One would think that Voldemort would be easy to defeat when one hand all of his memories but that would be a false statement. A sickly yellow spell was blocked before a bright orange wall of jagged light ripped through the air right towards Voldemort. Voldemort sent that one right back with fury and precision. "AVADA KEDAVRA!"

Harry sighed before he made measures to avoid that attack. Two more green lights were sent off and Voldemort staggered for a second, before he readjusted his footing, in time to see Harry block it in a bored, yet somehow amused manner. Voldemort was starting to fatigue as the duel went on but like a wounded animal, this made him even more dangerous. Voldemort spun his hand. The ground vibrated slightly but Harry managed to not be on top of the section that collapsed. Another spell struck Harry right in the chest. His shield blocked most of it but it still served to knock the wind out of him. Readjusting his footing, he turned just in time to react to a dangerous looking spell. It was shaped like a large black sickle that aimed right at his head, preparing to carve him into pieces but Harry conjured a stone shield in more time than was recommended. The attempt slightly exhausted him and his shield was busted into fragments, but at least the spell did not tear him to shreds.

"Okay, Riddle, if that's the game you want to play, then I can play," said Harry, as he threw a rapid fire succession of spells. Some of them were only slightly dangerous, only to divert Riddle's attention away from the more dangerous attacks that Harry was planning. To his credit, each and every attack had been countered in some way and Voldemort remained on the offensive.

“Really Potter, your attempt is rather pathetic, I’m actually ashamed now that some of my followers met their end by your actions,” said Voldemort as he avoided another assault. “Once I rebuild I will choose my followers more wisely and avoid...”

Voldemort was cut off by a stabbing pain in the side of his head. He gave a loud ear piercing shriek before quickly putting a silencing spell on himself to deprive Potter the pleasure of hearing his pain. Still staggered from the agony, Voldemort felt blood dripping down the side of his head, from a sickening three inch deep gash that Potter had opened with a rather dark curse. One that Voldemort could have sworn that he personally invented.

“You were saying, Riddle,” answered Harry and Voldemort launched into a rage fueled attack. Tasting his own blood had made him even more dangerous but so far, the duel was going mostly like Harry had intended it to go.

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Ginny sat, watching the duel, looking both anxious and excited at the same time. The other members of the D.A. along with their allies sat on pins and needles.

“I don’t think I’ve ever seen Harry do some of these spells or anyone for that matter,” said Sirius as his eyes widened at one attack from his godson.

“Well that might be the idea, but this is the first time I’ve actually taken time to watch him duel, it’s rather impressive and quite...alarming how intense he can get,” said Remus as he watched more attacks. “I don’t think there are many professional duelers could even match up with what Harry is doing...”

“I think Voldemort is at the end of his patience,” said Ginny as she watched Harry keep up the fight. “Especially after blood was drawn, I can only imagine what will happen when Harry reveals to Voldemort that his Horcruxes are good.”

“That will be entertaining, but Voldemort’s not going to give this up without a fight,” said Luna.

“That much is obvious, we’ll see how this turns out,” responded Daphne.

“Yes, I’m curious myself, to see what happens,” said Susan.

“I think Harry will succeed,” commented Astoria in a confident voice. “I don’t think any of us have really seen exactly how good Harry really is, some might have a better idea than others, but truthfully I think we have not seen the full extent of his powers.”

“I happen to agree with Astoria,” said Ginny with a smile as she watched Harry’s battle with Voldemort continue. “Harry’s only has shown what he’s need to show and nothing more. With each passing battle with Voldemort, he has to dig deeper and deeper, but he’s never struck his limits.”

“Harry has no limits,” said Lily calmly and everyone wondered whether she was stating a fact or if was just her biases as a mother showing through but everyone had no time to find out as the battle still raged on.

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Harry took a pained step forward. One of Voldemort’s curses had just managed to breach his defenses long enough to crack some ribs. Now, with his movement restricted, he needed to rely on his blocking and shield charms. Harry looked at Voldemort, who was bleeding and another dangerous looking spell was sent right towards Voldemort. A shield spell had narrowly blocked the charm and another spell fired back in return. The blue light flew right towards the air towards Voldemort. The spell was intended as a healing charm to jump start the heart of someone who had suffered a heart attack but when used on a healthy person it could be very fatal. Voldemort countered the attack and both wizards stood, at a stalemate.

“I have to win,” muttered Harry to himself, an intense look in his eyes as his wand held up. A loud crack signaled some smoke and from the smoke, several deadly looking birds dove right towards Voldemort. Their feathers were a coarse grey, with demonic red eyes, sharp claws and teeth, and forked tongues as they dove at Voldemort. He found himself discomfited by this new attack, as the birds dove at him. Several spells blasted towards the birds, many of them exploding into a shower of blood and internal organs, but others flying around, to resume the attack, dive bombing Voldemort’s face with their beaks. Harry maneuvered around a desk, to heal his rib injuries, along with a few other broken bones that were hindering his ability to properly defeat Voldemort.

A burst of black fire was aimed towards those demonic creations of Potter, causing Voldemort much irritation. He was sick of the games the brat was planning. One of the birds dove, ripping its claws down into the pale hand of Voldemort. Voldemort staggered, blood dripping from his hand. One of the birds dove right at his face and his beak bit down, ripping off a chunk of his forehead. The bird rose up, before it hacked the bit of Voldemort’s skin that it ripped out in disgust. A orange bolt struck the bird down and it spontaneously combusted. The birds fought but Voldemort had managed to strike most of them down, he readied himself for Potter’s next move. One more bird had its skull split by a curse.

Voldemort spun, just in time to block a skull splitting curse of Potter’s aimed towards him. The spell was blocked and a cloud of acid returned fire. At the last second, Harry threw himself out of the way and the acid ate right through the wall behind him. A conjured steel spike aimed right towards Voldemort’s heart in turn was blasted to dust as both wizards continued the fight, with neither backing up, not for a second. They refused to give up any ground as the battle raged on..

“Something has to give sooner or later, Riddle,” said Harry through gritted teeth as a simulated sonic vibration spell went through the air but Voldemort had long since known to be prepared to shield his ears. It was just a front with a blast of fire. Voldemort avoided being barbequed to a crisp by simply freezing the flames and continued the

fight. Signs of fatigue were starting to become evident with both wizards.

“It will Potter, but it won’t be with me,” said Voldemort as the next curse, with a bit more power thrown into it than normally due to the frustration setting in, was a curse that would rip Potter’s lungs to ribbons. Potter saw it coming and was half of a step away. A spell aimed towards Voldemort’s eyes to over stimulate his optic nerves was countered and once again, both competitors stood off.

“Then we come at a disagreement, because it will be you, Riddle,” responded Harry, as he aimed a cutting curse, with the simple intention of slitting Voldemort’s throat. Another block, but this one came closer to connecting. Of course, the curse that returned fire came rather closer than Harry would have liked as well. Two more spells collided with each other in mid air and the resulting explosion caused the opponents to stagger back, nearly knocked to the ground. It was only due to luck that they managed to remain on their feet. “Is that your best shot, Riddle? I’m almost saddened...”

Several razor sharp blades were blasted from Voldemort’s wand at Harry, all spinning at an insane rate. They would have hacked off limbs had Harry not conjured a wall of red mist around him. It was a very advanced dark arts spell but when the blades past right through them, they rusted and fell harmlessly to the ground. A whip of his wand sent a spike right towards Voldemort’s chest but once again it was blocked as both wizards continued to the fight.

“AVADA KEDAVRA!” shouted Voldemort suddenly, hoping to catch Potter off guard and it appeared to work. The boy was struck with the Killing Curse but instead of dropping to the ground, Potter appeared to burst into green mist that formed the message “HA HA HA” before the letters splashed magically created acid towards Voldemort. The acid splashed his right arm, rendering his wand arm unusable, forcing him to switch to his left hand.

A crack and Voldemort was knocked backwards right into the wall of Gringotts. He bounced back to his feet, angrily, before he threw two spells, as Potter had vanished from his line of sight. Something told

him the boy was rather near and he managed to throw off a couple more spells as the laughter of that brat echoed through his ears. It was slightly more difficult to aim spells with his wand arm taken out but Voldemort managed to adapt well enough.

“Show yourself, Potter, fight me like a wizard,” said Voldemort.

“I prefer to fight like a winner, but since you asked so nicely, I guess I'll have to honor that request,” said Harry as he appeared right in front of Voldemort, before he flicked his wand right at his enemy, sending a series of orange sphere shaped lights right at Voldemort's eyes. It caused his eyes to be bombarded by an overabundance of light until he was able to shield his eyes with the sleeve of his robes. Several of the spheres exploded, sending miniature spikes right towards Voldemort.

Harry watched, taking a breath, sweat dripping down his face. He had never used this much dark magic, ever in one sitting and he was in danger of being exhausted. The only consolation prize was that Voldemort looked equally battered but he held his wand. Harry took a deep breath, hoping to wrap this up in the same assault. Both wizards stood, before they threw their next attack simultaneously.

“AVADA KEDAVRA!” shouted Harry and Voldemort at the same time. Two green lights blasted through the air and struck each other in mid air. There was a vibration for a few brief seconds before a loud magical explosion. The explosion blasted both Voldemort and Harry to the ground and they crashed hard from the impact, both smashing onto the ground, lacking any movement as all of the windows in Gringotts blew up.

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Ginny sprung up to her feet immediately but she took a deep breath when she realized that the door would still not budge.

“He's still alive,” said Ginny.

“Yes, by the skin of his teeth,” offered Lily but she watched the battle intently.

“He’s moving too, that explosion caused a fair amount of damage,” said Neville in an awed voice.

“You know Harry, he won’t stay down,” stated Luna calmly.

“Of course,” said Ginny proudly as she watched Harry struggle to his feet despite the impact of the explosion.

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Harry took a deep breath, but it was a wonder that he could in fact breath. Voldemort’s body remained motionless before the Dark Lord’s fingers twitched and Harry dropped down to his knees, looking at his hands, which were slightly blackened due to the explosion.

“What will it take to put you down Riddle?” muttered Harry in his hands before he nodded, the question answered, as he switched wands as Voldemort got to his feet, equally surprised that his opponent had survived the attack.

“Impressive Potter, you survived that, perhaps you have earned just a bit of my respect,” stated Voldemort grudgingly. “It is a pity that...”

“You will have to die soon because Lord Voldemort can’t be defeated,” sad Harry in a dull, bored voice. “The fact that you can’t be killed coming from your mouth is getting old...”

“Not a mere boast, just stating a magical fact,” said Voldemort as he had just gotten his bearings back to him after the magical backlash from the colliding killing curses.

“The cup, the locket, the diary, the Diadem, the ring, and the snake...not any more,” stated Harry casually and there were seconds before Voldemort realized what Potter had implied. The look on Voldemort’s face was first surprise that it quickly turned into a look of pure rage. “That’s right Riddle, I destroyed all your Horcruxes, one by

one and the thing was, other than the snake and of course the diary, I doubted you had one hint of what was going on.”

“AVADA KEDAVRA!” shouted Voldemort as Harry sighed as he held up the Elder Wand, before it repelled the curse back at Voldemort. A stone shield absorbed the impact of the curse as Harry saw the look in the eyes of Voldemort, when he realized what Harry held in his hand. “The Elder wand...how?”

“Simple, Snape and Dumbledore played you for a fool with one scheme and I played them for fools with an ever bigger scheme,” stated Harry, a smile on his face as he looked at Voldemort. “Another thing you might have been after for years, even you would be intrigued by the legend.”

Voldemort did not respond with words. Rather a barrage of deadly curses, his single minded focus was to defeat Harry and claim possess to the Elder Wand. It was quite unfortunate for him that Harry was equally intent on keeping it. Harry pushed against Voldemort’s attack. Lord Voldemort’s head whiplashed back. The loud crack of bones snapping could be heard as Harry raised the wand. Voldemort still was able to fight, so unfortunately, his neck was not broken as Harry intended. Two spells collided together but the third one cut through Voldemort’s like a hot knife through butter. A fourth spell and Voldemort felt his chest rip open, blood splashing to the ground. Despite the fact that he may be breathing his last dying breath, Voldemort was too stubborn to not go down without taking Potter with him.

“AVADA KEDAVRA!” hacked Voldemort, as a shower of blood splattered out of his mouth, but Harry blocked the curse, the gaping hole right in Voldemort’s chest visible and his breathing become very forced. Harry drew his wrist back and hoisted his rival off the ground. A crash and Voldemort landed on the ground but he still showed signs of movement. He refused to accept his life was at an end. His body made it to his knees but he was hunched over. The rituals, in addition to the Horcruxes, had prolonged his life but a small piece of Voldemort wondered if that was a good thing. That piece was shut up by the rest of him who wanted Potter’s head.

Harry dropped to his knees, face drenched in sweat, eyes widened, black rings under his eyes, looking at his hands without blinking once before he looked up as Voldemort made his way, somehow, defying all logic and reason ever, to a standing position despite the gaping hole. Harry stood, still not blinking, his eyes moving from his hands to the ceiling for a brief second before they moved back towards Voldemort. Voldemort shakily raised his arm; with what might have been his last bit of strength, as Harry looked at his hands one more time, the Elder Wand clutched in his fist, before he nodded. It had to be done.

A green light was cut off in mid stream by a large blast of magic where it looked like no color could penetrate. Voldemort recognized the curse and wondered if Potter had gone off the deep end to try such a piece of dark magic. The curse enveloped Voldemort's body, completing eating through the Killing Curse he sent and the inhumane screams of agony could be heard. There was pain throughout Voldemort's mind, body, and soul. The agony was rather short lived in reality but it seemed like an eternity of torment before Voldemort's body abruptly shut down. Harry's eyes diverted up to the ceiling and back to his hands, feeling grimly satisfied at what had just occurred.

"Is that dark enough for you?" muttered Harry into his hands before he collapsed against the wall, his breathing rather shallow, a haunted, nearly disturbing look in his bloodshot eyes, looking half dead but Voldemort was all dead.

And that's Chapter Fifty.

Chapter Fifty One: Rebuilding

It took a few moments for it to totally sink in to Harry, as his eyes averted to the broken, battered form that was Lord Voldemort. There was no movement and taking a few deep breaths, Harry walked over to the fallen form of enemy. He looked down and sure enough, he had done it. Finally, Voldemort was gone and Harry relaxed as he had done it. He had proven without a shadow of a doubt who the most powerful, the greatest, the strongest, wizard was. The state that Voldemort's remains were had illustrated who that was and Harry smiled, as his head was still buzzing from the over abundance of dark magic. He threw more magic at Voldemort in one sitting than it was recommended.

"Deactivate magical protection barriers," stated Harry finally, as the buzzing in his head had finally cleared. The protective barriers around the chamber where the D.A. had watched the battle between the two great wizards, that kept them in and anyone else out, began to fade. Seconds later, Harry heard footsteps, and he watched with a smile as Ginny rushed him, with a triumphant look on her face. She threw her arms around Harry and kissed him. Harry returned the kiss, it was a true moment of triumph. The one wizard who could stand up to Harry and disrupt their plans had been destroyed.

"Finally, he's gone," breathed Ginny after she broken the kiss but her arms were still around Harry's neck, as they looked in each other's eyes. "You did it Harry...not that there was any doubt in my mind or there should have been but I'd be lying if I tried to say there were not times that I was worried."

"Believe me Ginny, I was too, I was fighting him, I threw everything that I had at him and if that last curse didn't hit, there was nothing else I could do that would put him down," stated Harry as he ran his fingers through Ginny's hair, as they held each other in their arms, smiling. "But there is nothing to worry about now, I've done it, Voldemort's finished and now we can take the step."

"Let's take today off Harry, you deserve a break, and then we can take the next steps tomorrow, you can reveal that Voldemort had

been finished off,” remarked Ginny as she gave Harry another kiss. “You deserve it Harry, after what happened.”

“Yes that would be for the best, I’m not in the mood to deal with anyone today, we can close the bank and stay here for the day, then I can reveal to the world that Voldemort was gone,” said Harry. “Although I’d imagine some people will find out sooner or later.”

Ginny nodded, but she and Harry moved. She had requested that the D.A. not bother Harry, he looked worn out but he was in a lot better condition than anyone else would have been after a battle with Lord Voldemort. The sun set today on the reign of Lord Voldemort and a new era will begin tomorrow, with a slow rebuilding process.

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A pair of Ministry officials dropped to the ground, screaming out in agony. Their forearms burned and the dark mark appeared on their arms before it faded completely. They were dazed before they got to their feet.

“The mark it’s not there anymore,” muttered one of the officials. “What happened to it...”

“I don’t know, it’s happened before, you weren’t a follower of the Dark Lord then,” said one of the Ministry officials. “When Potter managed to stumble into a victory against him, they all faded at once. They came back when he returned to power and he’ll return again. I just know it.”

“What do we do now?” asked one of the Ministry officials in a fearful voice but the older official just shrugged his shoulders, shaking his head.

“I’d prepare for anything if I were you, claim the Imperius, it’s worked before, the Ministry will buy it, that is if there is a Ministry anymore,” said the official. “After what the Dark Lord did, I doubt the Ministry will be around for much longer. Everyone will be too busy worrying about what they need to do to rebuild, than to worry about

the Dark Lord's followers. By the time everything is up and running, they're forget about us. Trust me, after a couple of years, no one really cared about uncovering Death Eaters the last time and that's with a Ministry fully running."

The younger official nodded, but his face looked unsure. He had just been marked weeks ago, because he feared for his life. Now, if the Dark Lord had met his demise, he would have nothing to turn to, accept hope he could fly underneath the radar. He walked into the corridors, as many people stood around. Some of them were whispering, perhaps if they were followers of the Dark Lord who knew he had fallen or those who had been forced to remain at the Ministry of Magic, out of fear of the Dark Lord.

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Amelia Bones walked through the shadows of a village. It was mostly abandoned but rumors reached her that there was some resistance to Voldemort here. She walked down the path towards a shed. It looked to be the place and she opened it up, an opening in the floor lead to an underground tunnel that she climbed down, where a mish mash group of witches and wizards, from just barely out of Hogwarts to over a hundred years hold, sat around.

"The Minister of Magic graces us with her presence," said one of the wizards with a slightly sarcastic look on his face. "Too bad it was too late to do anything."

"You lost the Ministry and you decide to come here, you lost Gringotts," stated a young witch.

"I find it rather sad that an underage wizard is the only hope for the Ministry," remarked an old wizard.

"He just turned seventeen," offered one of the members of the resistance, a look on his face.

"Doesn't matter, the Ministry might have avoided this problem if they just executed the bastards, instead of throwing them into Azkaban,"

said an older man in a gruff voice. "Not that I trust that Potter kid much myself, he was close to Fudge early on and to Dumbledore as well, who didn't do us any good with his little games."

"And just who do you think you are to pass judgment," said Amelia. "We are all against Lord Voldemort...on the same time, perhaps..."

"There is no perhaps about it, we are the true victims, not your Ministry, not Dumbledore's people, not Potter," stated one of the members of the resistance. "One thing is for certain, Lord Voldemort was created by the continued inaction of the Ministry. Dumbledore had his own agenda. At one point, we thought he might be the answer to our problems but apparently we were wrong on that account. Dumbledore could not be trusted and neither could his little protégé. It is a shame, he did have potential as a wizard, but he was corrupted by Dumbledore's influence. A real shame indeed."

"Now, I'm certain that you wish to help our attempts at resistance, but be warned, we don't play by the restricted rules the Ministry has laid down," stated another member of the resistance gruffly. "If we find some Death Eaters, they get struck down accordingly. We don't put them on a trial to throw them into a revolving trial."

"I see," said Amelia, unsure of what to say. Some of the members of this resistance force regarded the Ministry as a whole with distrust and given what she had to deal with during her time as Minister, she could not say that she really blamed them. Still, as she searched for the right words to gain their trust, a figure stumbled down a pathway. There appeared to be more than one path to headquarters but the members of the resistance held their wands, all looking uncertain before they relaxed.

"News from the Ministry, some of the officials have scrambled around, muttering, I managed to figure out what was going on, the Death Eaters in the Ministry, their marks are fading it seems, they are gone," said the Ministry spy as he looked at them.

"Happened before, how can we be sure that You-Know-Who is dead," said one of the resistance members calmly.

“Well, move in, we have word of where some of them have been known to stay, attack that and then we’ll know for sure,” said a gruff resistance member. “I trust there won’t be any problems with that.”

Right there, he looked at Amelia who looked back at them.

“I’m not the Minister as of right this moment, there is no Ministry to speak of if the rumors you brought back of his defeat are true,” said Amelia calmly as the resistance members exchanged looks before they grudgingly nodded in agreement. Even if she was still the Minister, it was highly unlikely she would be able to keep this group under control for long. They looked like the type that would do as they wished, despite the consequences. All she could do was have them locked up and that had proven to not work on more occasions than she could remember.

“Right, let us leave then,” said one of the resistance members before he turned to Amelia. “If you must, stay here, you should be protected or as protected as we are in this world.”

Amelia just responded with a nod, as she held her wand steady as they departed, one by one, to this supposed Death Eater stronghold. A worn wireless sat in the corner and she tuned it in. It was mostly dead air but there was always a chance that there would be some late breaking news. If Voldemort was gone for good, it would come out sooner or later. In the Wizarding World, people had the tendency of knowing such things.

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“Yesterday, you saw me defeat Lord Voldemort, using tactics that I hope you never have to use and by methods contrary to what I teach you in the Defense Association,” said Harry. “The reasons for this is simple, I wanted no hollow victory over Voldemort; I wanted a decisive victory in a duel. Could I have set some sort of trap for him and then leveled him with a few powerful spells as he struggled to break free? Yes. Could I have had you all attack him simultaneously and finish off the scraps? Absolutely. Could I have beat his brains him

with a tire iron? Yes, I could have done that as well, but anyone could have done those things. The point I wanted to prove was that not only could I defeat Voldemort but that I'm better than Voldemort."

"The point Harry is trying to make is, he can do many things that the normal person can't, it astonishes me even and I know him better than anyone else," commented Ginny. "Do not duel like Harry under any circumstances, no matter how talented you are, no matter how much improvement each and every one of you have made, and believe me you have all done well. Each of you has shown improvement between the moment you joined up with the Defense Association and now. That improvement has turned into real talent..."

"Yet, that talent will never surpass Harry's," inputted Luna. "Nothing wrong with that, just stating a fact. There will never be another Harry and I would not advise trying. It could be hazardous on your sanity."

"Besides there is nothing wrong with not being as good as Harry, because it still gives you room to be powerful in your own right," said Neville.

"In the D.A., we taught something that works for most people and as you've seen, it works well for the group and in most cases, Harry does stick with that," said Susan.

"However, what works for Harry, really works for Harry and hardly anyone else," concluded Daphne as Harry looked to the Defense Association, before he nodded.

"This is just one of many things that must be done, before the Wizarding World is changed for the best and it is closer to reality than before with my victory over Voldemort today," said Harry with a deep breath. "However, still work to be done, now that the country is in shambles, the government is in disarray, and people don't even have access to their gold. The power of the Wizarding World is in our hands and we can reshape it into something that will prevent the mistakes of the old world. Not easy, but it has to be done, by any means necessary, as everything is reshaped. There will be those who will be against what we're doing for many reasons, but that can't stop

us. Those people will be dealt with accordingly. They won't be allowed to stand in our way and the way of the changes. We will lead this world into a bright new future."

The D.A. cheered as Ginny craned her neck looking towards the door, as footsteps were heard before she began to speak.

"If I'm not mistaken, Fred and George are back from the outside from the mission you sent them on," said Ginny and certain enough, right on schedule, the twins walked into the room, with tired looks on their faces.

"What do you have to report?" asked Harry.

"All sorts of rumors are flying through the air, as you expected," said George. "Whoever remained of Riddle's followers were informed that their master died when their dark marks faded."

"Everyone else has put two and two together, but no one is doing anything right now, as no one knows anything for sure," added Fred. "Outside of a few riots, targeting pureblood estates of known Death Eaters, it has been pretty quiet on all fronts. There has not been an attack since right before you defeated Voldemort."

"Everyone's remaining quiet in other words, waiting and seeing what's going to happen," concluded George. "They won't act on anything yet other than select few."

"Typical," responded Harry as he shook his head. The Wizarding World could not act in any way, without someone in a position of power telling them what to think and how to act. With the Ministry in shambles and Voldemort and Dumbledore dead, no one knew what to do. It was quite fortunate that Harry was in the perfect position to take charge, with help of the D.A., and give the confused masses the direction they need. "It is time to squash all the rumors, to inform everyone what happened."

"Time to restore order then Harry?" asked Lily with a smile, as everything was going exactly how Harry and Ginny planned it. It just

showed that they planned everything to the detail so well, that if anything went wrong, it could be turned into an advantage.

“First we need to get word out somehow, that I’m going to have a press conference, talking about everything that happened, where everything will be revealed,” said Harry as he took a breath. “I will drop some news of things I plan on doing so we can see where everyone’s loyalties truly lie in this entire mess. Than anyone who is against us...well I regret the necessity of what has to be done but there is little can be done to correct the misconceptions of the ignorant.”

“We’ll do everything we can to get the word out then, to make sure as many people know,” offered Neville as several members of the D.A. got to their feet, to volunteer and Harry turned to them, with a deep breath.

“Tell them to be here at noon tomorrow, where I will confirm all the rumors about what has happened with Voldemort and what I hope to do to help the magical people in this country build the civilization that they should,” remarked Harry and they nodded, before the group prepared to make plans for the next stage.

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Minerva McGonagall sat outside the windows of Hogwarts, in thought. Normally she would be getting ready for another year at Hogwarts, but would there even be a Hogwarts? All of the letters to the new students had been sent out before the entire mess with Gringotts went down but the fact remained that now Hogwarts lacked the funds to sufficiently help those students who did not have the means to afford an education at Hogwarts. The world had fallen to pieces. Many would pinpoint the cause to be when Dumbledore died but Minerva found herself disagreeing with that fact. She could go further back to that entire mess involving the Goblet of Fire as being the day everything went wrong. The entire world was turned on its ear based on many scandals coming from that day and the events had directly lead to Voldemort returning to power. It also lead to Harry directly

taking a more active role in everything and his changes would be felt for sometime.

“Hello, Alastor,” said Minerva calmly at the clunking of the leg she heard behind her and Moody stood, his magical eye whizzing around.

“This damn leg just gets worse and worse every time, it’s like an advanced warning, I can’t sneak up on anyone anymore and catch them by surprise,” grumbled Moody. “The rumors, I trust you have heard them...”

“No, I’ve been busy worrying about what had to be done about Hogwarts,” responded Minerva crisply and Alastor responded with a nod, before he regarded her calmly, taking a deep breath.

“They’ve said that Voldemort might have met his end last night, again,” said Moody and judging by the look on his face, it was obvious that he was extremely skeptical about the validity of this claim. “A bunch of people are looking over their shoulders at the Ministry or what’s left of it, they’re running scared.”

“What do you believe is going on?” asked Minerva.

“I don’t buy he’s dead until I see the corpse,” responded Moody. “He’s pulled the die and come back trick before. I’m not sure if he’s even human any more, as much as I hate to say that but it may be true.”

“That might be the best policy,” agreed Minerva. While she would pleased that he was finally gone, they had let their guard lower too much last time and had cost them big time. Now, she hoped that more people would follow the idea that Voldemort’s not considered dead until they see the body. As she thought, a message came down the hall and Moody nodded, before he flicked his wand, causing it to vanish.

“Potter is making an announcement, outside of Gringotts tomorrow at noon,” responded Moody in a surprised voice, almost if he could not believe it. “All over the Wireless, and I bet the Daily Prophet will

have news of it when it comes out in a few hours.”

“Outside of Gringotts, with what’s happened with the goblins, is that really wise?” asked Minerva.

“Perhaps it might not be, but I intend to find out what is happening involving Potter along with the rest of the world,” said Moody firmly. “The rumors that have reached me, I’m not sure what to believe but if we hear what Potter has to say, then perhaps we have a better idea of what exactly is going on. The Order should be on guard just in case this is a carefully orchestrated trap set up by Lord Voldemort to lure everyone into a false sense of security and crush his remaining opposition.”

“Does this really have much of a chance of occurring?” asked Minerva in a slightly skeptical voice. “Would Voldemort go to the extent he has to do so if people are talking about their dark marks vanishing?”

“You can never be too careful,” said Moody. “I will contact all of the members of the Order of the Phoenix, and inform them of our current plan of action. If this is an attack, we will fight and make Voldemort regret the day he was born. There is a chance that it won’t be and if that is the case, perhaps Potter may enlighten us with what he is up to. Dumbledore was rather tight lipped about the subject and he died without us finding out anything. Then Potter vanished after his little battle with Voldemort and that was just before everything went to hell.”

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A respectable amount of the remaining Death Eaters, about eighteen or nineteen at all, had crowded around. The others who remained had gone underground.

“We have a problem, and that problem is Potter, he’s claiming that he will explain everything,” stated one of the Death Eaters. “He did something to the Dark Lord, but obviously we know the Dark Lord

can't be killed. He came back before and we will make sure he comes back again."

"So what's the plan?" asked another Death Eater.

"Capture Potter, kill as many of his friends as possible, and force him to lead us to the Dark Lord," stated the leader of the group. "Once we do so, we're be heroes among all people with the proper Wizarding mindset. Now do any of you have a problem with our plan?"

The Death Eaters shook their heads, some of them gracious that someone decided to take up a leadership role so they did not have to. They would go to this little press conference of Potter's and capture him there. It was no problem, he was just a half blood and perhaps got lucky again against the Dark Lord. Then their master would be reborn again and they could resume maintaining the traditions of the Wizarding World.

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Pretty much every witch and wizard in Britain was crowded an area outside of the bank of Gringotts. The crowd is buzzing, they had all heard the news, either first hand or from someone else that Harry Potter would be here, to address the rumors that had been spreading about Voldemort's latest defeat and perhaps his ultimate demise. Everyone had their own theories and there were some who believed it, while others who were skeptical after what happened last time. Still, right next to them was an elevated stage area, with several individuals dressed in exquisite robes with their identities obscured. They were the leaders of the D.A. and the Aurors that Harry had drafted into his employ, even though no one knew this. Other members of the D.A. and their allies were spread throughout the crowd, ready to signal at the sign of any trouble so it can be taken care of.

Harry walked through the podium with Ginny right next to him. Lily was closely behind, standing at the side, wand at her hand. Ginny

gave Harry a kiss before Harry turned, tapping his throat with his wand, so his voice could be heard by all.

“Welcome everyone, I’m sure you have heard the rumors by now and yes, I will address them as being true, Lord Voldemort has met his end yesterday when he battled me in a duel, this time for good,” responded Harry in a calm voice. “You can choose not to believe me but the fact of the matter is that Lord Voldemort will no longer be a threat based on the nature of his defeat. As for how it was done, it wasn’t easy and it wasn’t pleasant, but it had to be done. I will give Riddle credit; he was tough to put down for good. I threw pretty much everything that I had at him and a lot that I never could have believe I had. However, any way you look at it, the end result is the same, Lord Voldemort is finished, once and for all. I made sure of that this time.”

The crowd was excited with some smiles around but there were some sour looks and some rather skeptical looks as well. Despite the fact that Harry sounded confident, there were still those who were not going to believe Voldemort was dead until there was proof.

“How do we know you’re not lying and just have him locked up somewhere?” demanded one of the people in the crowd.

“Yeah that’s what Dumbledore would have done!” shouted another heckler and Harry just smirked, he never knew his job in acting that he was Dumbledore’s man all the way was with this much conviction.

“You don’t have anything to prove to these people, Harry, they should be lining up to thank you for dealing with Voldemort so they wouldn’t have to,” muttered Lily in Harry’s ear and Ginny looked like she thought along the same lines but Harry just nodded before turning to the crowd.

“You want proof, well I believe I can offer that, now those with weak stomachs, I would highly suggest you turn away, because the final fate of Riddle was quite ghastly,” remarked Harry and he turned to the crowd, giving them enough of an opportunity to turn away. Then with a wave of the wand, the remains of Lord Voldemort appeared, levitated in the air for all to see. His face was still visible but as for the

rest of him, he appeared to be mangled to shreds as if some type of powerful and deadly magic destroyed him. There were several gasps from the crowd, as many wondered what Harry could have done to him. Some respected him for taking the necessary steps to rid the world of Voldemort but others reacted with fear and disgust, turning away, almost shocked that someone could do such a thing.

The group of Death Eaters made their move; they had to retrieve that body and perhaps Potter but they only got about two steps, before the strategic placed D.A. members saw them moving forward towards the stage, wands raised and quickly dropped them with stunning spells. The Death Eaters were caught off guard, they were not the cream of the crop by any means and they crashed to the ground, where Harry just looked at them, as the Death Eaters were lead off into the containment cells beneath and he continued the speech as if nothing had happened.

“As I was saying, Voldemort’s gone and this is the proof right before you, now while I wouldn’t recommend resurrecting him after what he went through, but there will be people who refuse to listen, so to make sure there is no doubt about Voldemort returning,” said Harry as he pointed the Elder Wand to the levitating corpse of Voldemort and a blast of orange shot into it. The body burst into flames, being reduced to ashes in a matter of seconds. They fluttered to the ground, before Harry calmly pointed at them, before a vanishing spell caused the last remnants of Lord Voldemort to fade into oblivion. “Now with that out of the way, Riddle’s little sadistic campaign has caused the entire government of this country to be turned upside down. It started with his little well orchestrated power play at Gringotts and just went down from there. First I would like to address former Minister of Magic Amelia Bones, to say that she did about as well as could be expected given the laws of the Ministry of Magic. I understand the handcuffs that are placed on our leaders, even though I absolutely hate them. Still, she managed to make the best of a bad situation and escaped with her life intact. I have no doubts in saying that she may do her part to rebuild our government and move beyond the era of Voldemort. However, to fully move beyond, we must truly move forward, not staying rooted in the same outdated traditions or move two steps back like we historically do in these situations.”

Harry paused, as there were sounds of protest but they died down. They had saw what happened to the Death Eaters who had attempted to get at Potter and they were not about to suffer a similar fate.

“First, before the entire business with Voldemort, I managed to gain an audience with the goblins,” remarked Harry as he looked at the crowd. “They are intense negotiators but after several hours of us going back and forth, we came to an understanding. The goblins have realized that their time has passed them and will enjoy a nice retirement from magical society, handing over the control of the bank to me. Within the next couple of days, Gringotts will be reopened to the magical public and will be regulated by worthy individuals that are more than up to the task. I would like to say we have seen our last goblin rebellion but only time could answer those questions. No matter what will happen on that account, Gringotts will be rebuilt and the Wizarding World will achieve the status I feel it deserves.”

Once again there was another pause, as Harry allowed his comments to set a little bit, as the Defense Association Army and their allies retained their grips on the wands, ready to attack anyone who had attempted to try something. There were a few mutterings that did not compliment Harry at all, but that was to be expected.

“The Ministry of Magic will be restructured and rebuilt as well, it is in shambles and basically nonexistent right now, a brand new Ministry will be formed in the coming months, in the meantime, the members of the Wizengamot who still live will help run the country until we have a new Ministry and Minister of Magic,” responded Harry. “And before we start up the Ministry, we must determine who would be a positive to progression and who would just stand in the way of the future. Therefore, all witches and wizards, seventeen years and older, will be required to take part of an investigation, under Veritaserum, where we will determine where your loyalties truly stood during the conflict. Last time, too many people escaped with excuse they were under the Imperius Curse and it burned us badly in the end. This time, no follower of Voldemort will be left out there, to continue his work without him at a later date. Anyone who attempts to flee the country without taking part of this investigation will be considered to be

committing an act of treason. You will be contacted in a matter of days and also use of any antidotes will be prohibited. Extensive magical tests will be given before each investigation, at any potions in the bloodstream before the truth serum is performed. Anyone who has ingested an antidote will once again be considered to be committing an act of treason.”

Needless to say there were several uneasy mutterings from the crowd.

“What gives you the right to do this Potter?” demanded one of the members of the crowd.

“Now everyone will have a proper chance to state the truth and to prove that they are not a detriment to what needs to be done, but I do find that those who protest the loudest are usual hiding something,” remarked Harry. “As for what gives me the right to do this, well a number of things. I am using my own resources to help rebuild the Ministry of Magic. I got Gringotts back, when people said it was impossible. I defeated Lord Voldemort when a lot of people said it was hopeless. Perhaps some of you have done great things as well and I thank you, but most of the magical people in this country are nothing other than people willing to wait for others to do the work for them. If I didn’t seize the opportunity to rebuild, then what would happen? Perhaps this country would have ambled along in ruin, until another threat much like Voldemort, perhaps even worse, would have taken advantage of the sad condition that it was left in. Who would stand up if I was not here? Dumbledore’s gone, the Ministry of Magic is in shambles, and let’s face it, most of you still can’t utter the name of Lord Voldemort. He’s just nothing but a half blood psychopath with a wand. More or less, the vast majority of you are a bunch of sheep who would be lambs sent to the slaughter if I didn’t constantly break my neck trying to be the hero.”

Harry took a deep breath, as his eyes were widened and he was red in the face with anger. Some people looked put off, but others were nodding in agreement. Potter had done a lot for them and there were a lot of people who relied on what was done by others. However, that could not be them, they were not that.

“Still, all will get a fair shake to prove themselves, I’m not going to condemn anyone but this has to occur if we are to move forward,” continued Harry. “The problem doesn’t just exist in this country, everyone country in the world has the same degree of problems with its magical people, some worse. We need to progress forward. In the Muggle World, they don’t live pretty much the same way in the twentieth century as they did in the sixteenth century. While I’m not saying embrace Muggle technology, whether or not its better than magic is irrelevant, but we need to think forward. Maintaining traditions just because they are tradition is ludicrous. The thinking is very outdated which brings me to my next objective, Hogwarts.”

Everyone remained silent, wondering what Potter had to say about Hogwarts. He had proven that he was willing to rock the structure of the Wizarding World, but the traditions held at Hogwarts were older than any other. Even older than the first detailed records of the Ministry of Magic, predating it by a few centuries, even though no one could be certain exactly when the school was established.

“I respect the founders in many ways, they were ahead of their time in certain regards, as no one had established a school for magical children prior to them, so they did pave the way for many magical achievements, and we really do need more people in the vein of those four, as they allowed progression in an area where there was less than there was today,” stated Harry. “However, the four houses remained in place for many years and long since stopped being a plus to Hogwarts. Rather, it really caused our society as a whole to be crippled, stalling the cause for advancement and change. I’m referring to the house rivalry between the Gryffindor and Slytherin houses.”

Everyone had their attention towards Harry now. That argument was brought up every few decades, when people petitioned for the Hogwarts house system to be abolished. It rarely got far but no one held the power and the influence that Harry had.

“Some people just never stop being eleven years old and retain those common misconceptions, how everyone in the Slytherin house

is evil and how the Slytherins loathe Gryffindors because they are nothing but blood traitors and...Mudbloods,” stated Harry, as he choked the last word out, it pained him to say it even if it was a direct quote of the reflections of many Slytherins. “It is one vicious circle. What Salazar Slytherin did or did not do, I have no idea. History is reflected by people with their own biased opinions. However, Gryffindors believe all Slytherins are evil and do nothing to hide that option. Slytherins react accordingly, lashing out against Gryffindors because of what they believe to be prejudice beliefs. Gryffindors feel validated and continue to react. This sadly spills over into adult life and we have people driven to charismatic nutcases like Voldemort. All because of a disagreement between Gryffindor and Slytherin a millennium ago that may have been blown out of proportion for all we know and history has exaggerated what happened. We will never know. What we do know is that it is something that has long since outlived its usefulness. I am still Hogwarts High Inquisitor and I hereby abolish the Hogwarts house system.”

Several gasps could be heard and everyone muttered in shock. They wondered if Potter was serious.

“The legacy of Gryffindor, Slytherin, Ravenclaw, and Hufflepuff should be remembered for their accomplishments as people and the founding of the first and perhaps most prominent magical school in the world, but the house system is outdated, the first outdated system that I attend to place in the annals of history where it belongs,” stated Harry. “The sun set on one world and then rises on a new world. The first steps of progression will be made and I hope that we find many people willing to move forward or learn to. There will always be the unenlightened; I realize that but the barriers for progress will be knocked down one by one. I bid you all a good day and in the next few days, the changes I described will begin to take place. We move beyond what Voldemort put us through and the stagnation of a world trapped in another time. Progression begin soon but right now spend some time with your families and enjoy the fall of Lord Voldemort.”

People began to leave, muttering. Some of them were very intrigued about where this was going and very excited as well. Others felt uneasy and really uncomfortable, with the impression that the power had gone to Potter’s head. Very few of them were willing to do much

at the moment, other than grumble about a seventeen year old wizard was calling all of the shots and some did have something to hide. Many had just adopted an attitude of wait and see what Potter's plans did in practice as opposed to be in theory.

All did agree with one thing. The Wizarding World as they knew it may never be the same again.

That's Chapter Fifty One as we rapidly head into the home stretch. The next chapter, the reactions of many people about what is going down and Harry moves full force into the plans that he informed the world of, as he, Ginny, and the rest of the D.A. plot to carry them out by any means necessary. Also rumblings of resistance against the changes mandated by Harry, with people who just don't want to let go and others who just have an axe to grind with Harry for many reasons.

See you again soon.

Chapter Fifty Two: Struggles

Needless to say Harry Potter's announcement caused quite a stir. Some were for it, some were against, and others were neutral. The people who still wished to preserve the traditions of old were furious beyond belief that some upstart wizard had decided that he was changing the rules of the game. Some just simply stood there, gritting their teeth, refusing to do much more than complain. Others intended to try and take more drastic steps, but given what happened to the group that attempted to rush Potter, they were being very careful. One small slip up could have derailed any attempts to stop Potter before he gained too much steam.

Amelia Bones watched the press conference, blended into the crowd, but she still heard everything. Harry had always been the type to do things, rather than wait around to see what others would do. There were some drastic measures but she was no longer Minister of Magic. Thanks to a law, which was still in effect thanks to there being a Ministry, a Minister who fled the grounds during an attack had to resign automatically. Fleeing was something she did not wish to do, that had to be done in fact, but the laws were the law. Besides, a year as Minister felt like ten years and that was when the government was running as it should have been. With Voldemort it might as well have been fifteen years. She did not envy what Harry had ahead of him, there was a mess to clean up.

"Aunt Amelia!" hissed a voice and Amelia turned around, on her guard but saw Susan there smiling. "It's nice to see that you made it out alive."

"It wasn't easy, I'll tell you that much, but yes, I'm glad you're out as well," said Amelia but Susan just looked over her shoulder.

"Not safe here, let's go to the family estate, Harry has some things that he needs to know and I offered to ask him for you," stated Susan, adopting a business like expression on her face, but still relieved that her aunt had made it out safely. There were hints that she might of but just as many that she had met some unfortunately fate. Without another word, Susan transported her aunt to the family estate.

“Now what was it that Harry needed to know?” asked Amelia in a curious voice and Susan took a deep breath before addressing her aunt.

“First, I need to know what your opinion on what Harry proposed is,” stated Susan and Amelia paused, as if collecting her thoughts.

“It’s interesting what he’s trying to do, but I don’t know how far he’ll get,” stated Amelia. “After Voldemort...people won’t trust anyone. I do agree with doing away with the Hogwarts house system, as it might have lead to a lot of what Voldemort was able to accomplish. The problem is a lot of people might not go with what Harry wants, especially because they aren’t going to let go of what they are used to.”

“They will learn to adapt with what needs to done or we can do without them,” said Susan calmly. “After all, aren’t we better off without these people holding us back from our full potential?”

“Yes,” stated Amelia, nodding, some of the individuals in the Wizarding World did hold back any attempts and the laws in place had handcuffed her. However, there were some very real concerns, especially after she saw the state of what Voldemort looked like. “I’m just a bit...concerned about what Harry might do if he is backed into the corner. He pushed himself to his limits to defeat Voldemort...”

“Yes I agree there and the steps Harry had to take to defeat Voldemort were beyond what any wizard should,” said Susan but she sighed. “He does have the best interests for us all in mind, he is willing to sacrifice time and resources to build the world. Ginny does as well and there are...others as well with us. I was a bit skeptical at first when Harry first presented some ideas to a group of us. However, they do make sense and you can’t deny he’s done some things to better the world within the constrictions that we have.”

“No, I can’t deny that, the funding for Muggleborns, some of his reforms to make Hogwarts a more positive place, negotiating with the goblins to take Gringotts back,” stated Amelia as it did not escape her

that this was planned in advance. "Gringotts was one that got me. They refused to even open their doors to the Ministry...that disturbance that was reported, it didn't have anything to do with Harry."

"No, it was staged to keep Voldemort from guessing that Harry would gain control of the bank," responded Susan smoothly, using the explanation that Harry and Ginny told her to use if her aunt had brought up the issue. "I won't say it was the easiest or even the most pleasant thing to get the goblins to agree to our terms but it happened and nothing like this will ever happen again. We're recovering from it, but now the bank will be up and running soon enough and the world will be better off."

"That is something that no one could disagree with," remarked Amelia in calm, off handed voice as she regarded her niece. "After what happened, I'm concerned but...Harry seems to know what he's doing and he has plans for us. I suppose we should give him the benefit of the doubt. If nothing else, it might be better to be on his side than not on his side, in this very critical stage of the Wizarding World. He has shown that he shows no mercy for people who threatens him and the people he cares about."

"That much we both agree with," said Susan, as she would never forget what she saw when Harry defeated Voldemort. No one who saw it was. She took a deep breath, before she continued to talk to her aunt, trying to figure out where her head was at on various points. Harry had assumed that she would not be too much of a problem, she was always one of members of the Ministry who was for helping others and progressing the Wizarding World beyond the close minded standards. She was fought every step of the way and did not push as hard as she could. Mostly because she was not as influential as she needed to be but also because she recognized what might be a losing battle.

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Fred and George returned to the shop to check on their inventory. Ron was there, he seemed to spend a lot of time working, trying to

save up money for his own place, to get as far away from their mother as possible. Molly Weasley lashed out against everyone who had looked at her wrong, it was only out of the fact that she was their mother that Fred and George continued to send a portion of the gold that they made to help her live a relatively comfortable lifestyle. One would think she would be grateful but they had to endure snide remarks about their choice of career and also some choice comments about Ginny, corrupting “that poor boy” and turning him into a disrespectful young man. Apparently, telling the truth was considered disrespectful now.

“Oh, Fred and George, you’re here, nothing happened, I thought business would pick up after You-Know-Who was gone,” stated Ron as he wondered where the twins had been the last couple of days, but did not say anything. He would not get any answers so he neglected to push the issue.

“Ron, he’s dead,” responded George seriously.

“Yeah, he won’t magically appear if you say his name three times in a row,” commented Fred.

“Voldemort, Voldemort, Voldemort,” remarked George and Ron winced at each name but nothing happened. “See nothing happened.”

“How do you know he’s gone this time?” asked Ron in a skeptical voice, he might not be well read or particularly bright, but he knew enough to understand that Voldemort had cheated death once before.

“We saw him die, it wasn’t pretty, it wasn’t pleasant, but he’s dead,” commented Fred in a serious voice or as the twins got.

“Yeah, did you go to the press conference that Harry held?” asked George. “Even if you did not see the final defeat, he made it clear that Voldemort was dead and not coming back. His corpse setting on fire and the ashes getting vanished might have something to do about that.”

“No, I didn’t go to Potter’s self serving victory party, I could not stand to see him gloat,” responded Ron and Fred and George just exchanged pitying smiles. Ron was of age and he still could not let his jealousy of Harry let go. “I heard that he’s making plans to restructure the world and people might be complaining because he gets his way...he always gets his way because he’s Harry...”

“Enough Ron, Harry did a lot for people like you who just sat back and complained, but did very little,” said George in a stern voice. “You don’t know what he had to do to defeat Voldemort and what he still has to do. The world will be a lot better off after he’s done.”

“Yes, Ron, as you’ve been told countless times, Harry’s earned the right to these things, he’s worked for him,” said Fred. “As he rightfully said, he nearly broke his neck for a world that gives him little in return and will always follow what the mass opinion is.”

“I know but he has everything, I’m not saying he’s not a good wizard...but...” stated Ron but he trailed off. “I lost Hermione because of him, he did nothing to stop her from leaving and I found out weeks after she was gone. After all I did, standing by her when everyone shunned her because of a few mistakes. Then, all of the sudden, after the spell backfired on her, she acted like I did not exist.”

“I don’t know what to tell you there Ron, she might have blamed you as a cause of what happened regardless of what Harry did or did not do,” responded George as he looked at Ron. “The inner workings of the female mind are difficult to figure out a lot of the time, hell the majority of the time they’re nearly impossible”

“But we do know one thing, Harry and Ginny as well are trying to fix everything and anyone who might speak out against them, whether its because of jealousy or not, might not be looked in a favorable manner,” responded George calmly. “Harry and Ginny can be rather tolerate about people stating their opinions but...”

“There are others that quite frankly aren’t, they take what Harry and Ginny say rather seriously,” said Fred and Ron just looked at his

brothers. There was nothing he could say except nod before he voiced something else that had been bothering him.

“I just don’t know about the way he went off on Mum that one day...I mean we all thought about it but what he said and Ginny as well, I just don’t know if it was the right thing to say,” responded Ron in an uncomfortable voice. “Mum has not been in the best frame of mind since Dad was killed...”

“I know, Harry said some things and so did Ginny, but Mum kind of pressed the issue with her attitude,” said Fred, knowing how offended Harry with Molly’s controlling nature, mostly directed towards Ginny. That’s what really set him off.

“He wasn’t like this until he started dating Ginny, I knew him best, I should know,” responded Ron and Fred and George exchanged looks. It was very difficult not to bring up that Ron and Hermione’s little attitude problems.

“That Harry Potter is gone, died when his name came out of the Goblet of Fire,” responded George.

“This one is much better I think, we would have been doomed with the old Harry Potter,” remarked Fred. “He was a bit of an underachiever, always putting off things to the last minute, not really all that ambitious with what he needed to do.”

Ron just shrugged. The old Harry was his best friend, until he lost his temper. This one on the other hand, he scared Ron to put it bluntly. There was an underlying sinister nature to him and Ginny as well, that they were willing to do anything to achieve their means.

“Now, once Gringotts has opened back up, they’re will be people in here, so let’s stock the shelves and make sure everything is ready for people to spend their gold,” commented George, switching gears immediately and Ron responded by nodding. There was a lot of work to do to get the joke shop running when the customers kept pouring in.

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Moody walked down the halls towards the meeting point that Potter had indicated when he had sent the message. The Order of the Phoenix had been sent a message by someone claiming to be Potter to request a meeting. How Potter knew they were still intact, Moody could only begin to guess. Perhaps Dumbledore had told him but still Moody remained on his guard. This could very well be a trap to pick off the remaining members of the Order of the Phoenix. After that group of wizards took a shot at Potter in broad daylight, the desperation of the people after the recent events were underlined.

“Okay, everyone remain ready, wands in your hands, do not set them down even to itch your nose,” barked Moody. “This person says it’s Potter, but I’m not taking any chances. There are still Death Eaters out there, maybe not as many as there were but after what happened today and what had happened in the past, it’s not something I’m willing to risk.”

“Moody, I admire your dedication to Constant Vigilance under any circumstances, you were right not to trust the fact it was me but the fact is, it is me,” said Harry as he looked at Moody. “To prove that I’m telling the truth, you lost your eye, not in a battle against a Death Eater like everyone would like to believe but rather by a magically curse weed whacker and you were lucky not to lose any other parts if you know what I...”

“Yes, Potter, I believe you,” said Moody in a gruff voice; he had only told that story to Dumbledore and Potter. He did not even tell it to the imposter, while under the Imperius and he managed to go through his memories with a Pensieve to comb over every detail after that. “You have stirred up a lot, more than I could have thought of you, with your blind devotion with Dumbledore...”

“You ought to know by now that things are rarely as they seem,” stated Harry and Moody laughed at that.

“True, but the fact you defeated Voldemort...” responded Moody but Harry held up his hand to cut Moody off.

“This isn’t going to be a lecture about using dark arts, because trust me I know and I couldn’t defeat Voldemort any other way, if there were I would have tried, I’m well aware of what they can do to the human mind but it had to be done,” said Harry in one breath.

“You won’t get a lecture of me because I can still see you have control of your mental facilities,” responded Moody. “Dumbledore might be rolling over in his grave, but that’s his problem, if he was willing to take the gloves off, maybe we wouldn’t have this problem. No, what I’m asking you about is what were you doing with Dumbledore. I know he sent you on some kind of mission but he never said why.”

“He was very vague even when giving me a lot of the information but long story short, Voldemort made Horcruxes, six of them and I had to destroy them all before he was killed, it was lucky that I had some Basilisk venom on hand,” responded Harry in an off handed voice, giving Moody enough information that he would be satisfied and would not dig too deep, without giving him the entire truth.

“Yes, I heard the tale of your defeat of that beast in the Chamber of Secrets but I could not have imagined that you would have had access to the spoils of victory, Dumbledore must have kept that secret from us,” stated Moody. “Not there is anything to be done about that, by ancient pureblood laws it was yours by those rights and it did come in handy. I still think you were lucky to defeat such a dangerous creature.”

“So do I, but luck can only get you so far, without the skill and the intelligence to back it off but I’m not complaining about the gifts that luck gave me,” said Harry before he cleared his throat. “Enough small talk, the fact remains I’m put in a tight bind right now with the existence of the Order of the Phoenix. A group that has been branded as an illegal vigilante organization by the Ministry of Magic I might add and required to disband.”

“But we had to be out there, to protect from You-Know-Who and...” stated one of the members but Moody shot him a glare. It would only

serve to lessen their chances at getting away with minimal punishment. If they played their cards right they would only be forced to disband.

“Yes, the Order, I must say, I owed Dumbledore a favor, he requested that I lead it, with him being allowed to advise me on certain matters,” remarked Moody. “Not that the new Order did much good, the defense of Hogwarts was a fiasco, it’s a miracle that no one was killed other than some Death Eaters...”

“No one was killed because I picked up the slack with my own security measures that I implemented,” remarked Harry calmly and Moody just looked at him. “Don’t look too shocked, Alastor, I was the Hogwarts High Inquisitor for a reason, not because I wanted a fancy title and more power than someone should have. I took safety of the students of Hogwarts into consideration and made arrangements accordingly.”

“I should have known, Potter, I should have known,” responded Moody as he looked at Harry with an almost approving smile on his scar lined face. “What you did worked out well enough so...about the Order...”

“Disband it or I’m afraid the Wizengamot will be forced to take legal action about your group,” said Harry. “You have to understand that while your help was appreciated, there is no need for the group right now, especially one that has a shoddy track record of checking the backgrounds of its members. The names Severus Snape and Peter Pettigrew should ring a bell and remind you what I’m talking about.”

“I get the message loud and clear, I’m overdue for a long, quiet retirement anyway,” said Moody gruffly. “Good luck Potter, trust me, you’ll need it.”

“Luck has nothing to do with it as I said, well a little bit, but skill and intelligence more so than anything,” remarked Harry. “Enjoy your retirement Moody, do try and stay out of trouble.”

“You will as well, Potter, come up, you lot, let’s go, the lad’s got enough on his plate without you loitering around,” said Moody and the moment they walked from the room, some of them began complaining.

“We protect his neck and make sure he doesn’t get himself killed and this is the thanks we get,” muttered one of the members of the Order.

“It’s obvious he’s going dark, after what he did to Voldemort, I bet there is something more sinister going on with the goblins,” commented another Order member. “Moody, I don’t care what he says, we’ve got to stop Potter before he gains too much power.”

“Yeah right and after that, I’ll go in for a custom fitting of my noose,” stated Moody. “The boy might be a little brutal but face it; he has every right to be to fix the mistakes of the past. I’m done, retired, this time for good. I’d like to live my last few years in a world that’s actually not staying in one place. If you want to stop Potter, knock yourselves out but don’t expect me to bail you out when you fail to do so. But, I’m done trying to stick my nose where it’s not needed or wanted. Whatever happens, happens, there is nothing else that can be done other than that.”

The members of the former Order of the Phoenix looked at each other, as if they were quite disappointed that Moody did not want to go with their plans to stop what they perceived to be a future dark lord. Moody just looked at them.

“It’s over, Voldemort’s gone this time, there is no need for us anymore, I doubt we did much help in the long run anyway, so you’re all dismissed,” barked Moody in a forceful voice that left no room for argument. While Moody might have said the Order of the Phoenix was finished, some of them resolved to keep fighting the good fight, against anyone who attempted to disrupt their way of life. Even though if the enemy was different but the goals remained the same.

Harry Potter must be stopped at all costs.

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“I believe everything should be ready before September First, the bank will be open within the next couple of days, giving everyone enough time to purchase their supplies,” remarked Ginny in a calm voice, as she was at Hogwarts, presenting McGonagall with a list of decrees that would mandate the running of Hogwarts. “Now, Divination is a subject that we feel has no practical use. If one has the gift, they should learn it on their own time and History of Magic...we do need a teacher that doesn’t put his students to sleep. In the past six years, I remember nothing of value and there aren’t any good historians out there due to the fact that few, if any take the subject because of the teacher. In fact, the only one’s of value come outside of the country. That has to change, as we can’t rely on people from outside of the country to chronicle events that happened here objectively. They would paint us in a bad light and discount everything we’ve done. Harry deserves an accurate depiction of the selfless work he’s done. I doubt it would do anyone much justice if he’s painted as someone who has their own agenda.”

“No, I can see where that might be a problem,” said McGonagall in a calm voice, who was just glad that the school would be opened back up before the year began. It would cause headaches. “I will make the staff adjustments as you intended and this thing with the houses abolished...”

“Has to be done,” commented Ginny in a calm voice. “There is no other way, we are taking steps to avoid what happened. As for the older students, they’re going to have to learn to live with it. There are no Slytherins, Ravenclaws, Hufflepuffs, or Gryffindors, just Hogwarts students. I would change the décor of the Common Rooms as well, leaving no hint that it never belonged to a house. I’m sure the house elves will appreciate the work.”

“You have no idea,” commented Minerva dryly as Ginny handed her a list.

“Books that have been approved by Harry and me, also ran by the Board of Governors, they might seem a bit advanced based on the

way things used to be at Hogwarts but the future starts now,” remarked Ginny. “We can’t just wait for the rest of the world to catch up to us. Offer support when necessary, but we want to get to a level that’s not only comparable to a few other schools that have bypassed us but we want to get to a level above them. The term dark magic has also been banned. All magic can be used for malicious intent and people will learn to keep an open mind. Healing magic can be used to do harm when cast on a healthy person in many instances and dark magic can be used to help save lives from a murderous lunatic. You understand what we’re trying to do.”

“Its clear to me now,” said Minerva. “I’ll make the adjustments and call a staff meeting to inform them of the changes.”

“ Excellent, Harry or I will be in touch with any last minute instructions,” remarked Ginny with a smile as she watched off. She had to meet with Harry outside, as he would be wrapping up his business with the Order pretty soon.

Minerva sank down into a chair. Hogwarts was going to be interesting this year. Of course, there was never a dull moment with a school full of magical children, who were trying to learn how to control their talents and then utilize them to their fullest extent. Still she was skeptical exactly how well this would go over. As Hogwarts Headmistress, she needed to find a way to ease the turmoil what would be a rather uncomfortable transition to a new era of the Wizarding World.

She also had to inform two of her staff members that they would be out of a job. Granted, she could not understand for the life of her why Binns was kept around after all of those years. As for Trelawney, well she was not about to complain if Mr. Potter and Miss Weasley wanted to do away with that subject.

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“The Order is now disbanded, well Moody disbanded it, I think some are thinking me as the new great evil,” said Harry with a snicker.

“How soon they forget that they would be in the cold hard ground if it was not for me.”

“No one you can’t beat in your sleep, right?” asked Ginny and Harry just responded with a nod. “I just gave McGonagall the last decrees we had past before this went down and a reminder that you abolishing the house system was not a spur of the moment decision. She went along with it, not that she had much choice.”

“No she didn’t,” said Harry, as they walked into Hogsmeade, hand in hand. The village was quiet and rather peaceful. Suddenly, a message appeared. “The Wizengamot is ready to meet, Neville said, but there are a few formerly influential Ministry officials protesting. They look to be among the potential problems with discussed before.”

“I guess we better see what this is all about,” said Ginny, as she looked forward to spending a long day with Harry but business before pleasure and all of that. There would be plenty of time for them later, when all of the resistance had been kept in order or demoralized to the point where they lost the will to fight back.

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Lily walked the halls of Gringotts, reflecting on her life and the time she spent trapped in her son’s body. The moment she came to Hogwarts, she saw the faults of the world exposed with every single waking moment that she spent in that place. She tended to be a brighter than average person for her age and she kept a relatively low profile. That allowed her to gain the information she needed, more than she ever wanted about the faults of the world. The never ending conflict between Gryffindor and Slytherin left a sour taste in their mouth, both sides trying to present themselves as the one’s who were victimized. The truth was that both sides had contributed to the problem, along with Ravenclaws and Hufflepuffs, who did nothing to help with the closed minded attitudes. The fact that Ravenclaws were considered to be smart was rather amusing. Some of them were granted, but the elitist attitudes exhibited by some of them during her time were appalling. There was a great deal of purebloods in that house, which actually believed that their place in the house was

based on their superiority in the field of intelligence. Hufflepuffs had the least problems out of the four Hogwarts houses, but they still had their flaws that contributed to the problems. Lily was glad that one of Harry's first decisions after his victory was to abolish the house system. It was a few hundred years overdue in her opinion. There would be no Voldemort and maybe even several other dark wizards as well with that in place.

Harry and Ginny for that matter had done a superb job in picking those who would be an asset to the rebuilding of the Wizarding World other than a liability. That was only small fraction of the entire population but they had done their job in picking people who would lead the population forward instead of holding them in place. The dream she had of the Wizarding World being fixed was coming closer. They were only focusing on Britain right now, but they could extend their influence elsewhere in time. It was not going to be done by being nice and playing fair. The other side sure would not to keep there demented ideals in place.

Lily noticed the snide remarks some people made in the crowd when Harry had informed them of what needed to be done. It disgusted her to no end that some people could be that ignorant. Among those voices were people who had suffered at the hands of Voldemort and they should have learned. Yet they learned absolutely nothing. They were willing to brand Harry as a sadistic madman who did not have their best interests in mind, forgetting that without Harry, they would be under the thumb of a true psychopath that was only out for himself and his power. In the best interests of the Wizarding World, it would be better off if those people would be silenced. Right now plans were being made to do just that. Pretty soon those individuals with opinions that are out of date would be considering a permanent retirement from public eye.

It would be no less than they deserved. It was Harry's divine right to reshape the fractured government in this country into anything he chose. He earned that right; Ginny earned that right, as well as the rest of the D.A. and their allies, to lay down the law.

“Now that I’m here, we can get this meeting of the Wizengamot in session,” said Harry as they entered the courtroom but a group of wizards in dress robes, with well groomed hair looked at them.

“We will not be ignored, Mr. Potter,” responded one of the wizards in a crisp, voice as he looked Harry, as Ginny, Luna, Neville, Susan, and Daphne all exchanged looks, all sat in seats of prominence, with the other members of the court, who Harry got along well with and that they had similar philosophies, even though they did not work directly with Harry also had dubious expressions on their faces.

“Very well, the court acknowledges...forgive me, I’m not aware of who you people are,” remarked Harry in an indifferent voice, which slightly offended the self serving pureblood wizards that stood in front of him.

“We are the Council of Pureblood Warlocks for Magical Tradition,” responded one of the wizards in a proud voice, which caused Luna to roll her eyes but Harry just gave her a mock disapproving look. “We offer our congratulations for your victory over that ruffian Lord Voldemort. He is truly a black mark on tradition, we were appalled to find out that he was a bastard child of a love potion induced romance between a squib and a common Muggle. As far as we are concerned, that is the lowest of the low.”

“ But enough chit chat, we are very concerned about the Wizengamot, it appears that a number of well meaning pureblood families, why young Miss Lovegood recently acquired a seat and she only has five generations of pureblood ancestry on her mother’s side and three on her father’s, making her not quite right to maintain the traditions of blood purity that are held up by the Wizengamot,” said another wizard. “Our members here have a minimum of twelve generations of pureblood ancestry with both of our parents and while we feel the execution of Muggleborn witches and wizards is barbaric, they should start at the bottom of the social rung, working their way up, until new pureblood dynasties are created over the years.”

“Therefore, we have a petition of fifty pureblood families, who I can assure you were not in the league with Voldemort, to have an

overhaul of the Wizengamot, allowing us a chance to rightfully claim our spots based on our status and proving our blood purity,” stated another member of the council as he gently slid Harry a petition, from his hands covered with white gloves. “We also highly recommend that the arranged marriage contracts be reestablished. They were sadly done away with fifty years ago and we feel they have lead to the current sad state of the Wizarding World, these poor attempts to revolutionize traditions that should remain in place.”

“Lastly and we can’t say enough how appreciated your defeat of Lord Voldemort is, we feel you are not quite right to lead the magical people of this great country, as your ill fated attempts to revolutionize this country has proven, you need an education on pureblood society and etiquette,” said one of the wizards in a superior voice and the D.A. members exchanged looks before they began to laugh. The other members of the Wizengamot also joined in as the Council of Pureblood Warlocks for Magical Tradition looked extremely offended.

“We fail to see how this is a matter of great humor,” responded one of the warlocks in a confused voice.

“Your er opinions are greatly appreciated, but at this time, the Wizengamot is following the will of the newly appointed Chief Warlock Harry Potter,” said Luna

“Wait a minute, Chief Warlock?” asked Harry. “Did I miss something here?”

“Oh wait, we weren’t supposed to announce that until after we voted,” said Luna in an apologetic voice. “All in favor of Harry getting named the new Chief Warlock of the Wizengamot, yes I believe that is unanimous. Congratulations Harry, you’re the new Chief Warlock after the last one had a mishap with the Killing Curse.”

“No, this cannot be, his mother was a first generation witch,” stated one of the warlocks in a manner so overblown that Harry wondered if this was someone’s idea of a completely bad practical joke.

“Yeah and your point is?” asked Harry. “Sounds to me you’re just a more gentlemanly version of the same old rubbish that I just took out. If you want your spots on the Wizengamot, then we’ll do this the old fashion way. One of you can beat me in a duel but I’m going to warn you, we’re still getting the blood stains of the last person I dueled off of the Gringotts lobby floor.”

“No that won’t be necessary but please, we beg of you, give our petition some thought,” responded one of the warlocks in a pleading voice.

“Okay, I’ll give it all of the thought it deserves,” said Harry as he paused for a second before he continued. “Okay, denied, I made this speech to the world the other day about how we’re not going to remain rooted in the past just because that’s the way it always is. I’d like to stick with that plan if we can. No one is opposed.”

“Well quite frankly...” stated one of the warlocks but Harry silenced him.

“Anyone who’s opinion matters in this court room have a problem with that?” asked Harry and everyone shook their heads. “You’ve been dismissed, good bye and good day. I suspect we will be in touch again soon.”

“Yes, we shall Mr. Potter, we will not rest until the well respect traditions of magical society is maintained, you have not seen the last of us,” remarked one of the warlocks as they filed out of the courtroom in an orderly manner, their noses sticking in the air.

“Now, onto business for today, the beginnings of questioning people, to see where they stand with this rebuilding process and where their sympathies lie,” remarked Harry.

“As you questioned, I have purchased a large stock of Veritiserum from overseas and what we don’t have, there will be people brewing,” said Daphne.

“So we focus on the potential problem people first, until we get the rest brewed?” asked Neville.

“That much is obvious,” remarked another court member. “Our estimates have indicated that this may take up to two or three months to get everyone arranged for questioning.”

“Yes, we will take as much time as necessary but now our friends at the Council of Pureblood Warlocks for Magical Traditions have pointed us in the right direction on who to start with,” remarked Harry as he held the petition that had presented to him. “A lot is to be done and it will be done, no matter how much time it takes. Now, as for the proposed legislation regarding magical children with muggleborn families, I believe you are all in favor of the proposed terms there.”

Everyone nodded as the legislation would be one of the first laws passed in the new era of Wizarding Britain. It would prevent magical children in muggleborn families from being mistreated because of their abilities. If those families were caught doing so, they would be punished to the fullest extent of the law.

The Wizengamot session continued, as several new laws passed that would be the cornerstone of the new Ministry of Magic once it was up and running again.

And there's Chapter Fifty Two. We have approximately three more chapters or so left and then I can close the book on this story. It's been fun, but all things must come to an end sometime. The final arc is up and running, as changes are beginning to take fold, but not without controversy in certain circles.

Next chapter, the only person who could possibly defeat Harry Potter hatches his cunning plan to achieve his ends as the story winds to a close.

Chapter Fifty Three: Schemes

“This petition other than the fact it’s amusing...some of the families on here, well I don’t recognize a lot of them,” said Ginny with a frown as the Defense Association Army Leaders met privately, separate from the other members of the Wizengamot. She sat against Harry, the list on a table in front of them, the other members of the D.A crowded around. “A few I do but the vast majority of these fifty pureblood families, I can’t remember seeing there name’s anyway.”

“Some of them look vaguely familiar,” admitted Daphne. “Not from around here though, from other countries, some who have no business whatsoever trying to influence what is going on here.”

“This Pureblood Warlock Council of Magical Traditions, I’ve seen a few passing references to them somewhere, I think, but I brushed them off as a myth,” contributed Susan. “They’re said to be a group who is fanatically dedicated to maintaining the same traditions that have been held in pureblood society for centuries, with members in many countries, even those with a small magical population.”

“Only cropping up when they feel there is a threat to their little values, now I remember,” said Harry. “Or rather Voldemort does, it’s been a few years and I still haven’t gotten a feel of all of what he knows for when I absorbed those memories. They stepped in a few times in history, when there were drastic attempts to change the structure of magical governments. Magically speaking they are not much of a threat but there influence might be a bit of an issue for us.”

“So what to do now?” asked Luna.

“The same thing we’ve been doing, moving forward, I’m not about to let a few self centered pompous warlocks dictate what we need to do,” said Harry. “They forgot that I defeated Voldemort, when they did not lift a finger. They might have saw him as something that they were disgusted by, but they were unable or unwilling to lift even one finger.”

“We can say that for about seventy five percent of this country,” offered Neville.

“Now, the number might not be that high but pretty close, maybe seventy one or two,” said Ginny with a snicker. “So the plan is to discredit them...”

“They are a mostly unknown enemy, something that I have to be careful with dealing with but I don’t think there will be too much of a problem, they won’t fight me physically,” said Harry. “Mostly they’re going to hire a magical assassin to cause me to have a little accident that puts me out of the way and causes us to crumble apart. Not that it will happen, but that sounds like their game.”

“Oh is that all,” said Luna as the others were looking more worried than Harry was but Harry just responded with a smile.

“I beat Voldemort, some hitman for hire shouldn’t be much of a problem, I beat Dumbledore too,” said Harry with a smirk on his face, as he ran his fingers through Ginny’s hair as she just looked worried but only to an extent. She knew Harry could handle himself but it was the fact that something might have happened to comprise all of their hard work that worried both of them.

“Knowing Harry, there’s already a plan of some sort forming in his mind,” said Luna.

“Yes, I would imagine there would be,” said Daphne. “After all the success we had, Dumbledore falling, Gringotts falling, Voldemort’s defeat, and the soon to be restructuring of the Ministry none of those...”

“Could be possible without Harry’s hard work and planning,” said Susan.

“I’m going to save Harry the trouble of saying that this could not have been done without the hard work of the D.A. as well,” said Ginny, and Harry nodded with a smile, confirming what she said but

before he could respond to the question, there was a knock on the door outside of where they were.

“Come in,” stated Harry and it was Lily, who had removed Harry’s Invisibility Cloak the moment she had entered the Wizengamot Courtroom. “Everything go well with Gringotts?”

“Yes, Harry, everyone’s going well, perfect even, it should be up and running by the end of the week at the current rate,” said Lily. “Now as you requested, all the remaining confirmed Death Eaters with gold had their assets removed from their personal vaults and it was all set towards a fund to help support the education of Muggleborn witches and wizards, to teach them about the basics of magic once they show their first signs, before they even start Hogwarts.”

“Excellent, I trust the purebloods can handle things on their own with their children,” said Harry. “We’ll distribute pamphlets about what magical children are required to learn before they attend to Hogwarts. What we had to learn in the first year and a half are the basics, but we need to get ahead of the curve now.”

“I’m sure we can figure out all of those details soon enough,” said Ginny but Lily obviously had something more to say.

“I thought you want to know this, but a bunch of people are outside in Diagon Alley, protesting that you’re dragging traditional magical values down into a sewer,” said Lily and Harry just responded with a sigh, putting his head in his hands but he still looked sort of amused by the lengths these people would go.

“That would be our new friends, the Pureblood Council of Warlocks for Magical Tradition or something along those lines,” said Luna.

“Someone needs to remove the stick they have shoved up their ass and beat them with it,” said Daphne. “We have enough problems right now, without this lot sticking their noses where it’s not needed.”

“Maybe we should send the D.A. out there to put them in line,” suggested Neville. “After goblins and Death Eaters, they shouldn’t be a problem.”

“As amusing as that would be, it would just give them an opportunity to cast them as the bad guys, especially in a public forum like Diagon Alley,” said Harry firmly. “They’re trying to bait us into making a wrong move so they can pounce on it.”

“I’m with Harry here, there are more cerebral ways to do this,” agreed Ginny as the others now knew where they were coming from. “Turn their attempts to trick us into making the first move back around against them.”

“It’s a game of mental chess, but one that can easily be won I think, given enough time,” said Harry before he turned to Susan, Luna, Daphne, Neville, and Ginny. “I need to check up on some things with the Hogwarts Board of Governors, to see who is still alive, who needs to be replaced and all that. I’ll meet you here in the next hour, get the D.A. ready for a meeting, so we can prepare for our next step in our plan.”

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Sibyll Trelawney walked down from her tower slowly, making her way to the office of the Hogwarts Headmistress. Throughout the last day she had suffered headaches, along with a sense of dread that she could not pinpoint. Hours of crystal gazing had not allowed her to seize any explanation but something told her that it would be disastrous for her own future. After Harry Potter was said to defeat the Dark Lord, she felt both a sense of joy and dread. Obviously, the Dark Lord meant doom for all life but Harry Potter was not exactly the best person to step forward into a position of power. Death looked around every corner for the boy, since the moment she met him almost four years ago but yet he managed to cheat the glooming specter of the grim reaper. Something about that boy was inhuman; it was almost like he had no concept of mortality or failure. The grim should have spelled his doom but yet after she had saw it, his

fortunes had rose. He had to be the individual who defied fate that had been prophesized for years.

“Yes, Minerva, you wished to see me,” said Trelawney as she sat down in the Headmistress’s office across from a very tired and morose looking Professor McGonagall.

“Yes, Sibyll, I have, now you have been a valued member of staff for years and loyal as well,” said McGonagall who despite her distaste for the subject of Divination, did not make letting go a member of her staff due to a class being cancelled any easier. “I find your subject of magic to beyond my grasp but at the same time it is with a heavy heart that I’m going to have to let you go. The subject of Divination has been determined to be not a subject fitting for the direction of Hogwarts, as we move forward to better and brighter things.”

“I see,” responded Trelawney in a calm voice. “He showed a few glaring hints of potential during his fourth year but nothing that he ever followed up on. I’ll leave, if that is what is wanted of me but Harry Potter can’t hide from his fate forever. Or maybe he can. If he is the one, then we’re doomed, he can shape the world at his whims and only one can stop him, which I doubt will occur any time soon.”

Minerva opened her mouth to ask what Trelawney was talking about. Than on the other hand she really thought she could go without knowing. Quickly, she changed the subject in her mind.

“I could have the house elves take your belongings from the tower if you would like,” stated Minerva but the former Divination teacher responded by shaking her head.

“I already taken the liberty of doing that the previous week, on the chance that I had to hand in my resignation if He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named had taken control of Hogwarts and forced us under his rule,” stated Trelawney in a misty tone of voice. “However, the Inner Eye did sense that I may have to leave, even if it was not privy to the exact details of what was occurring. I bid you farewell Minerva and as always, I do hope that what has been foretold has been mistaken.

There is more of a potential for disaster than you could ever realize. Goodbye and may fortune shine fondly upon you.”

Without another word or a backwards glance, Trelawney left. McGonagall went in her desk, hoping that there was headache relief potion there, so she did not have to make an additional trip to the Hospital Wing to obtain one. Letting Binns go was slightly easier than this but finding a replacement for him might be more difficult. Once again, Minerva was at a loss at why Dumbledore kept the ghost around as a teacher, when he had turned many students off to what could have been an interesting subject. Then again, there were many things that Dumbledore did that perplexed Minerva to no end. She brushed aside the latest addition of the Daily Prophet, which announced that Harry was named the Chief Warlock of the Wizengamot and with no Ministry in place, thus no Minister; he was technically the most powerful person in the land. It talked about some resistance; some cutting words about how people soon forgot what Harry had done for them. Minerva just briefly glanced over it, before brushing it aside. She had her own issues to worry about, thus finding a new History of Magic teacher and switching up the lesson plans to fit the new education objectives.

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Harry faced the Hogwarts Board of Governors, all nine of them that remained. Three were still missing, presumed dead but nothing was for certain until a body was found. Harry turned to address them.

“Welcome, I’m sure you thought this meeting would not occur before Hogwarts, as of the turmoil, but the education of our students can’t be held off for any reason,” stated Harry firmly, as he held papers in his hand. “There has been some concern about the newest education objectives that I have put into place...”

“There have been, Mr. Potter,” confirmed one of the Governors as he looked at Harry. “We’re willing to go along with the plan of abolishing the house system, because your arguments are compelling enough for it. It has lead to a lot of misfortune and turmoil with the recent conflict that might have been avoided if we were

unified. As you rightfully stated, it's one vicious circle that never has ended and may have never ended had you not stepped in when you did."

"Be that as it may, we are rather concerned about the new educational mandates that you gave to Hogwarts, once again, an area where we can see where you're coming from, but it perhaps may be a cause of too much too soon," stated another Governor and Harry could tell that had given this matter some thought before he showed up. That was fine, because he had given it plenty of thought as well, with plenty of research. "Perhaps we should adopt a slower and less intense approach, see exactly how well the education of the students with the unified house system pans out before we go for your more intense level of reforms."

"I have given this manner much thought, looking at the Hogwarts education fifty years ago and I found something rather shocking and quite enlightening," remarked Harry calmly. "The educational changes I'm requesting wasn't too different than what was in place then. In fact, it might be slightly less intense as well, as the support for Muggleborn witches and wizards to be on a more equal ground for their pureblood counterparts didn't exist back then. It was more overwhelming for those people, so the changes had been presented, shifting the entire structure of Hogwarts, exactly how the seven years of education would be arranged. It was a step backwards, that really put us at a greater risk for threats like Voldemort to rise. Many were dissatisfied with the watered down education at Hogwarts and looked into other means to fulfill their ambitions to learn magic. Ministry mandates passed down and what was considered dark magic didn't really help either."

The members of the Board of Governors looked at Harry, many of them extremely skeptical but Harry pulled out a folder, with a stack of documents, statistics that he had members of the D.A. research to sway the arguments his way. Anyone could find data that would properly support their argument if they knew where to look.

"These statistics will prove that a more difficult learning environment is something that will work better," commented Harry as he passed

around several copies to the Board of Governors to look over. "People getting arrested for dark magic for then and after then, you would find a higher number these days and not just because of Voldemort. Not only that but the average Hogwarts grades were much higher back then because they were now and the Auror employment rate was three times what it is today. There's more but this is just a general overview. I rarely go for staying in the past but we should return to what worked well then and better it. A more intense learning environment will benefit us all, with a higher quality of teaching. As I had mentioned, I'm willing to fund teaching Muggleborn witches and wizards the basics that they must know before attending Hogwarts, as for the purebloods, well they have parents or older siblings to teach them. Everyone will have an opportunity but it's what they do with those opportunities."

"Your proposal is quite intriguing, Mr. Potter," stated one of the governors calmly. "Once we are fully back in session, changes and additions may be made, but you have an extremely compelling argument."

"Of course, I wouldn't go into a meeting with you lot without doing the proper research, you'll eat me alive," said Harry but they were as humorless as ever. "All input is appreciated, but you gave me the power as Hogwarts High Inquisitor to do what I felt was best for the future of the students of Hogwarts. I will continue to do that with or without the consent of the Board."

"Now see here Mr. Potter, the Board of Governors established that position for a reason but we are still the ultimate authority when it comes to maintaining Hogwarts, we gave you the power, we can take that power away should be choose to do so," said one of the members of the Board of Governors, in an attempt to back Harry into a corner but he just stood there, smiling, as if this fact did not bother him at all.

"Can you be sure of that?" asked Harry. "I've always said that the Board of Governors is a useful resource, in helping governing Hogwarts, but there have come times where you have overstepped your bounds in the past. Letting Lucius Malfoy blackmail you all was

one of your most pathetic moments, but there are other moments where you have not shined too well. We wouldn't want to dig up anything that might call the usefulness of the Board of Governors into question, now would we?"

"A threat, Mr. Potter, we would have thought you to be above such things," said one of the members of the Board.

"I am above such things, I don't make threats, I make promises that I intend to carry out for the good of the Wizarding World," responded Harry. "Try and sway my opinion if you must, but remember, people will listen to what I say. This entire country owes me a debt of gratitude, well except for the people who put their loyalties with the wrong side, but you'll find the majority of the country is rather glad that Voldemort is gone. I hope that the Board of Governors would cooperate with what needs to be done, I think most of you have done an admirable job in maintaining Hogwarts."

Harry paused as the Board exchanged looks with each other, but he was not bothered by the mutterings from the Board of Governors around him.

"So I will allow you to debate the findings I've given you and I will return in a few days as I have under things that must be done," said Harry as he walked off, as the Board of Governors in debate, some agreeing with Harry but others who looked like they regretted ever appointing Harry as the Hogwarts High Inquisitor.

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After the meeting with the Defense Association Army, Harry and Ginny sat in a room privately, as the day wound to a close. Providing that nothing else happened today, they had nothing to do until tomorrow with the grand re-opening of Gringotts.

"A couple of attacks today, I'm worried that some people might not be too happy about our new way of government," said Harry as Ginny shook her head sadly.

“I know, we always thought there would be people who would rebel, it’s quite sad, they will never learn,” said Ginny. “The Ministry of Magic restructuring is going to be a slow and painful process.”

“Let’s worry about Hogwarts and Gringotts first, then we’ll deal with the Ministry,” said Harry. “It will be done, just give us time. We have more than enough, with Voldemort out of the way. The current threats to what we want to do are minor...annoyances.”

“So we can deal with them easily,” said Ginny, as she looked at Harry. “But this plan of yours...”

“It will work Ginny, have faith in it, I don’t fail,” responded Harry.

“I have faith in you and that this will work, I just hope it quiets the resistance,” said Ginny, as she grasped Harry’s hands. Harry tightened his grip on her hands, looking in her brown eyes.

“We could have taken out anyone who opposed us but that would cast us in a bad light, us making a move to defend ourselves, that’s another issue all together,” remarked Harry as he pulled Ginny in closely, their lips touching together in a kiss, fingers running through each other’s hair, as Harry slowly backed off so he could speak easily. “We’ve won one battle, a big one, but it was won. The next one will prove that we are the people who are worthy of deciding the fate of the magical people in this country.”

“We will succeed at any costs, the D.A. are up to it, they have proved themselves time again,” said Ginny. “I must say, Lily looks like she is willing to do everything in her power to cause people who speak out against you in a defamatory way to be painted as the insane ones. Those articles that she wrote in the Daily Prophet today...”

“I thought that might have been Mum, it sounded like something like she would say, about delusional pompous twits that are stuck in the sixteenth century and to feel free to join us in the present time, if they can handle it, something like that,” said Harry. “The Daily Prophet

might be our greatest resource to open up the eye's of people, because they tend to believe everything they read. The people who refuse to believe anything other than their own misguided opinions, they might not, but with Voldemort, he might have had a few more followers than he did."

"Yes giving Rita that information was one of the more brilliant things that we could have done, but Downfall still qualifies as the most brilliant," said Ginny and they both snickered. Voldemort died thinking that Bellatrix betrayed him or lost her mind completely.

"What happened to Dumbledore is up there as well," said Harry. "Gringotts is reopened tomorrow; all is going according to plan."

"All will stay according to plan when you're around Harry," responded Ginny, as they exchanged another kiss, arms wrapped tightly around each other, hands roaming and clothes somehow finding their way to the floor, as the two leaders of the future of the Wizarding World prepared to finally get some well earned time alone with each other.

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Luna looked down the lobby of Gringotts as she stood with Neville and Susan, waiting for word from the team that had been sent out to scour Knockturn Alley. There was a rumor that the remaining Death Eaters had been holed up in that horrid place but it was something they should check out at any rate. It would be the perfect place to hide to spring an attack and disrupt the grand opening of Gringotts tomorrow.

"What's the word?" asked Luna, as Daphne and Astoria lead a rather sizeable group of D.A. members along with a few Aurors back into the bank.

"Dead end," responded Daphne. "No people that are on our watch list, that were hiding, a few shopkeepers, but Knockturn Alley is mostly abandoned. Unless they're hiding really good, I don't think there is anyone there that we need to be concerned about right now."

“I was sure that would be a good lead,” said Neville.

“It sounded like one but it was too obvious to be in a place that is commonly associated by the general public with dark magic,” said Astoria.

“There have been a couple of attacks, but nothing successful and nothing fatal, people just won’t let go and realize that Voldemort is gone,” remarked Susan sadly. “Or they’re deciding to rebel against what we’re trying to do.”

“I can’t believe these people, Harry and Ginny are doing nothing but good for them, I don’t see anyone else trying to rebuild after Voldemort, in fact a lot of these people just crawled under a rock and decided to complain about things not going their way,” said Astoria in an irritated tone of voice. “We would be better off without these people ruining things.”

“Well once the trials began, those people won’t be much of a problem anymore, as Veritaserum will ferret out the truth,” commented Daphne. “It’s just like everything else in life, when you’re the underdog, everyone is cheering for you. When you actually succeed at doing something, everyone finds flaws with everything you do and you can’t do anything right to please a lot of the people.”

“Sad but true,” said Luna but they had to cut this conversation off as there was still a fair amount of work if they want to get the grand opening of Gringotts up and running smoothly. It was a vital opponent for the success of the Wizarding World.

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The representatives of the Pureblood Council of Warlocks For Magical Tradition entered a rather musty building with a foul smell in the air, some of their noses stuck into the air as they walked forward and looking around.

“Are you quite sure this is the place where our mysterious informant requested us to meet?” asked one of the council members.

“Yes, I’m sure but it looks like a rather foul establishment,” said one of the council members but several pops interrupted their attempts to piece together the situation and a small group of about sixteen Death Eaters, very few if any of them high ranking, stood there.

“Okay, boys, that guy sent us a note saying that he would meet up with us for a plan to eliminate Potter but all I see here is a bunch of overstuff pureblood ponces,” said the Death Eater in a crude voice, as he looked at the Pureblood Council of Warlocks for Magical Tradition with disdain. “Don’t tell me you were the people who sent for us.”

“I can assure you my dear gentleman, it was not us, and it appears we were both summoned here by someone who has an interest in dealing Harry Potter an ending before he does too much damage,” said one of the council members in a pompous tone of voice but the Death Eaters pointed their wands at them in a threatening manner. “Really, there is no need for such barbaric brutality...”

“You better cough up some information rather quick, because it’s risky going out where Potter can nail us,” said the Death Eaters but several other pops signaled the arrival of the representatives of the Order of the Phoenix arrived and recoiled when they saw the wizards in Death Eater robes.

“I knew it was a trap,” said a female member of the Order and the Order of the Phoenix immediately, without thinking, had began to curse the Death Eaters. The Pureblood Council of Warlocks for Magical Tradition stepped back, looking very mortified at the lack of dignity expressed by both sides as several spells flew. Just when the battle was about to get deadly, a large golden dome appeared between the two groups and the spells bounced off of both sides. The Death Eaters and the members of the Order of the Phoenix crashed to the ground, but scrambled to their feet, looking rather irritated as an imposing figure appeared from the shadows.

“What is this?” asked one of the council members in a voice that demanded explanations. “Who are you?”

“It’s the guy who wrote us that later, telling us to come here,” remarked one of the Death Eaters in a knowledgeable voice but he held his wand.

“You mean it wasn’t a trap,” said one of the members of the Order.

“Well it’s no wonder the Order of the Phoenix was so successful in dealing with the Dark Lord, with brilliant deductions like that,” responded another Death Eater in a sarcastic tone of voice, rolling her eyes slightly. “What would you lot do without Potter or Dumbledore, you would have flopped fast.”

“Potter’s turned dark, that is the only reason why he defeated the Dark Lord,” argued an Order member.

“As amusing as it is to see all of you bicker back and forth, I did call you here on an urgent and pressing matter,” remarked the hooded figure as he looked around at them. “Let it be clear, alone, each and every one of you will fall to Harry Potter. He will topple you in an instant. To put it bluntly, you don’t have a snowball’s chance in hell in defeating him.”

“Then why did you call us here if you thought we had no hope,” challenged one of the members of the Order.

“Yes it makes little sense, we don’t want to kill young Potter, just cut off his power right at the knees,” said one of the council members.

“You either kill Potter or you fall, there is no halfway as many have already found out,” said the hooded figure. “You’re looking right here at the only person who has a prayer in beating Harry Potter.”

“Yeah right, I’ll believe it when I see it, Potter beat the Dark Lord and several senior Death Eaters, what makes you think that we believe that some joke underneath a hood can defeat Potter,”

responded one of the Death Eaters in a challenging voice and suddenly a blast of orange light appeared, striking the Death Eater in the chest. His organs were ripped to shreds, along with his skin and blood splashed to the ground as he dropped as well. The hooded figure stood, unconcerned at he had just struck down a man in cold blooded murder and the members of the Pureblood Council of Warlocks for Magical Tradition looked positively mortified at what they had witnessed. It had offended their delicate sensibilities.

“I believe we will have no further problems and no doubt coming from any of you,” said the hooded figure, the fact that they sensed his eyes looking at them but could not see them made the matter that much creepier. “Now as I was saying, before I was rudely interrupted, I’m the only person who can beat Harry Potter. There is no doubt in my mind and if you follow my plan, you will get precisely what you deserve. Tomorrow, there will be the grand reopening of Gringotts. Strike there.”

“But all of those innocent people...” stated one of the members of the Order.

“Some have to die so others shall live,” said the hooded figure in a morbid tone of voice. “Now, once you follow my plan, it will lead to the proper outcome that will benefit everyone. This is what must be done to lead to success.”

And that’s Chapter Fifty Three. For some reason, this took longer than I expected to right. I think it might be because I’m suffering from a tad bit of burnout but Chapter Fifty Four should be a bit easier considering its intended to be an extended fight scene and those always tend to be so fun to write that I can get through them quicker than the character driven chapters. And then there’s the last chapter, which may be the shortest chapter since the first one. Slightly longer, but just tying a nice little bow on the completed story.

For the record, I do have some ideas for future stories but nothing more than ideas. After I’m done and after a bit of a break, I may sit down and see if any of them can be fleshed out into a story. I’ll be adamant about one thing. I put more thought and time into this story

than I personally recommend for what amounts to a hobby. The next story, if I write anything that is, will not be this long. Still I have some ideas and when I have a chance to think about them a bit more, we'll see how they go.

Well I've rambled enough. See you again soon before Chapter Fifty Four and then shortly thereafter the final chapter. As where we go from there, well this universe will be done, there is not any new ground I feel I can travel.

Chapter Fifty Four: Empire

The sun rose on the Wizarding World for what may prove to be a rather pivotal day. Historians would look back on this day and remember it. Whether it would be fondly or not, time would tell but if certain people had their way, it would be the beginning of a glorious new era in the Wizarding World. The dark clouds left by Voldemort had cleared and now Gringotts was reopened. Security was being tightened, both with manpower and also with the amount of protective spells placed around the bank. An image of a magically created countdown indicated there was two hours and fifty nine minutes and sixteen seconds until the bank was to be reopened. The members of the press had already arrived at the Leaky Cauldron; they wished to be on the ground floor with this new era of the Wizarding World. Several other people would be coming in shortly, to finally have access to their gold after being shut off over the past couple of weeks. The popularity of Harry Potter was at an all time high, after defeating Voldemort, many would have decided to take some time off and perhaps leave the country. Harry continued to work tirelessly. Sure they were some people who grumbled, but most agreed with the sentiment in the Daily Prophet that anyone who had a complaint with Potter were ungrateful pompous twits who were arrogant enough to decide they needed the power. They had their power and influence handed to them and were willing to let a young wizard who had accomplished more in a few years than they would in their entire life to do all the work. Then they wanted to take credit.

Those sentiments were shared by one Lily Potter. Well they should have been, as she was the one that got them started, under an assumed name and a Polyjuice Potion that she used to disguise. She was glad she had the opportunity to gain a second chance at life, because up until the moment Voldemort threw the Killing Curse, the world she lived in was not that great. Sure there were some moments and some things, but really, Lily felt that she wanted the opportunity to do more. She managed to use the ritual and hoped to do so, to lead Harry in the right direction from day one. The note in the vault was a backup plan because she knew by now that nothing tended to go right. It took sixteen years but she finally came back to life and she did so in style, slaughtering several Death Eaters. Killing Snape had been a liberating experience; it erased the mistake she made when

she was young and naïve. The fact that he still appeared to carry a torch for her after all of these years was quite sad. Lily thought she could not have made herself any clearer that she wanted nothing to do with Snape. In fact once James had finally removed his head from his arse, she chose him and never regretted it for a moment.

Other than Harry and Ginny, no one worked harder in getting everything ready for a new era in the Wizarding World. Starting with the citizens of this government and after a time, they would slowly spread their influence to other countries, eliminating their problems. It was a very long term plan but the immediate goal had been achieved. Harry and Ginny had the Ministry, Gringotts, and Hogwarts in their grasp and most accepted it because that just meant one less thing they had to worry about. Others refused to give into change but they would be dealt with soon enough. These unenlightened people would never see the truth, of what must be done.

Lily smiled, almost in a creepy and sadistic way, but it was a smile nevertheless. Only her son and his girlfriend could pull this off and they were the only one's who knew what was best for the Wizarding world. She would do her part to help. The Defense Association Army and their allies would enforce the laws, because by proxy they were the law. The next generation would live in a world where there was no need to be limited by the same restrictions and the same outdated prejudices of old. They would grow up learning exactly why Harry Potter and Ginny Weasley were heroes that were worth of their respect and admiration. How their selfless sacrifices had accomplished more than anyone previously would dare to dream, despite people trying to shut them down out every opportunity and mold them into their own image.

In the end, Lily was glad she was around to see this, to live in this new world and not linger in the afterlife, in bitterness about what could have happened had her and James not been so foolish in putting their trust in Dumbledore. Instead, she had a second chance and other than Harry and Ginny, no one had done more and she had some pretty decent competition. Luna, Neville, Daphne, Astoria, Fred, George, and many others had worked hard. Still without Harry and Ginny, they would not have gotten these opportunities.

Still, Lily made a mental note to send Hermione Granger a Christmas Card every year because without her, none of this change would have been possible. Harry was a far better person that she would ever be not to dump that know-it-all into a mental institution and forget about her. Then again, she would have also made sure that Ron Weasley never reproduced either, to save some poor innocent child the torment but she could not imagine the woman who would have such a piece of human life.

Lily continued to make sure all the security measures of the important vaults were in order, switched up enough so any remaining goblins still out there did not try anything. It was always a possibility they would try something but now with the entire structure of Gringotts drastically altered, they would walking into a trap. There was enough goblin DNA that they had at their disposal to make the adjustments needed.

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“It’s nearly time, I can’t believe it,” said Harry, as Ginny rested against him, opening her eyes, her hair slightly messed up but looking as beautiful and radiant as Harry had always saw her. Ginny turned slightly and kissed Harry. Both had their arms wrapped around each other, it looked to be a brilliant day outside, beautiful, the perfect day to start a brand new era and they looked at each other. “After all that work, it’s nearly ready.”

“You should be proud, Gringotts is back open, now all of your hard work will pay off,” said Ginny, as she heard some noise. People were moving around the bank, getting ready. “Of course, you’re not the only one who is dedicated in making this work.”

“No, I ask everyone to rise to the occasion one more time and they deliver big time,” remarked Harry as they both got to their feet and made their way outside their private room that was a converted staff room. Both of the leaders of the Wizarding World looked at each other, before they exchanged another kiss and broke apart. “Today our empire begins officially.”

“And nothing will be the same ever again, in our Wizarding World,” said Ginny as they walked out to oversee a few last minute preparations, both in the knowing today would be a rather eventful day. History would smile on this day.

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Rita Skeeter sat in the Leaky Cauldron, back from her self imposed exile to Tibet after writing her little piece exposing Voldemort. She returned to find that her piece had won several journalism awards that had translated into gold, that she happily claimed. Now that Voldemort was out of the way, she could safely return without any retribution. She had kept up on the news very little, the Downfall attacks that had began just right around the time she left had heightened to a brand new level and then suddenly stopped without any explanation. Then the goblins lost Gringotts and subsequently relinquished it to Harry Potter. Then Voldemort was killed in a final duel with Potter. Rita had tried to piece together more details, her journalistic instincts heightened at the thought of the investigation. Her nose for news had suspected that there was something more sinister about Gringotts being relinquished to Potter that he was cutting off. She had several pieces planned that hinted that Potter might be turning to the dark arts but shelved them when her editor told her there was no demand. Therefore she wrote the positive pieces. Now that he appeared to be the most powerful wizard in the country, with the demise of Dumbledore and Voldemort, people would be clamoring to see their hero being taken down a peg. The rise of the hero sold papers but a fall sold even more.

She tapped her quill as several of her fellow Daily Prophet reporters looked at her, in surprise and other members of the press filed in, as Gringotts would open in less than an hour.

“Well looked what crawled out from underneath a rock,” said one of the reporters, a greasy haired man, with a look. “Rita Skeeter, decided to come join us when it was safe after You-Know-Who died.”

“I wanted an extended vacation, but now that I’m back, I’m ready to dig up some dirt on Harry Potter, our new Chief Warlock of the

Wizengamot and Director of Gringotts, I think it might be Dumbledore all over again, a wizard with too much power,” said Rita but her fellow reporters looked at her as if she was insane.

“Bad things happen to those who oppose Potter openly, some reporter tried to write a piece about him, hinting that he had killed his Muggle relatives and was behind the Downfall scheme, it never made it to the paper and he sent a note of resignation the next day, saying that he needed to leave the country,” said a reporter in a hushed voice, but Rita looked skeptical.

“Yes, I’ve had my share of threats, but if I could take a crack at the reputation of the most feared dark lord in a century, some wizard who is barely of age is nothing I’m afraid of,” said Rita.

“We’re in danger even talking to you, people who had openly opposed Potter in the Wizengamot had been exposed as Death Eaters and replaced by people that are allies of his,” whispered one of the reporters in a hushed voice. “None of us can print this...”

“I fear nothing, not Potter, not his girlfriend, or any of his friends,” said Rita with a smirk on her face as the reporters scooted their chairs away. “Really and you call yourselves journalists. If I wanted a safe job, I would have never gone into this line of work.”

The other members of the press just looked at Rita, in an attempt to distance themselves from her but a voice was heard from the back room of the Leaky Cauldron, as Tom was at the other end of the bar, attending to some new arrivals.

“Floo Call in the back for Rita Skeeter, Rita Skeeter, Floo Call in the back room,” said a female voice in the back and Rita got up without a second thought. Most likely it was her editor at the Daily Prophet, to tell her of a date where she would be reinstated to the paper. She walked in the back room and seconds later, the door sealed itself shut. She pulled out her wand but she was quickly disarmed in an instant and Rita turned around, to see two females. One of them had bubble gum pink hair and the other one, she did a double take at the identity of her.

“Lily Potter!” gasped Rita, as she was first scared, then excited. If she could talk herself out of this or perhaps transform into her Animagus form, this would be the story of the century.

“In the flesh,” commented Lily dryly. “I wouldn’t bother, the room has been charmed against it and silencing spells as well, so no one would hear your screams. I know you’re thinking that this is pure journalistic dynamite that you could use to earn yourself more gold but you won’t be alive long enough to even think too much about it.”

“Oh is it because I wanted to expose the truth about what your son was doing...” stated Rita as she was slapped hard across the face by Lily, hard, which drew blood. She stepped back, blood dripping from her cheek. “I wonder what dark ritual he used to bring you...”

Rita was silenced before she was blasted back against the wall. Lily looked over at her as Tonks looked slightly amused and a bit disturbed, but it was necessary.

“Listen here, next time you say anything, I will start removing body parts,” stated Lily in a dangerous voice, eyes flaring with madness. “Harry and Ginny have worked tirelessly to help change the sad, broken government in this country for the better. You on the other end, thrive on bringing down people through your yellow journalism. You could have done that article about Voldemort for free and do the right thing, but you just had to be paid for it before you would even lift your quill. Now you want to try and stir up the citizens in the country, to try and ruin the hard work of many people. Not this time, Skeeter.”

“The people have a right to know...” stated Rita but she quickly shut up at the murderous glare Lily was giving her. She scrambled to find a way to bargain her way out of this one.

“The people will know what they need to know and nothing more,” responded Lily calmly. “Will there be things that need to be done that might be questionable? Yes, of course, that is the nature of rebuilding. However, they are things that have to be done that no one else is willing to do. We did what we had to do with Gringotts, we did what

we had to do to reform the Ministry as best we could before Voldemort toppled it and this time we can reform it without the mistakes of the previous regime in place. Hogwarts as well and we took down the majority of the Death Eaters. People don't succeed by playing by the rules. This isn't some idealistic fantasy, this is the real world."

"Okay, you've made your point, please let me go and I promise not to write one negative word about Harry or anyone else aligned with him, I will write nothing but positive words about him, just let me go," begged Rita.

"Begging, that's pretty pathetic for someone who said she didn't fear anything, but pardon me if I don't believe you Skeeter, you've been allowed to exist because Harry and Ginny had a use for you and you did your part in helping turn a fair few people off to Voldemort, the number of Death Eaters dropping dead did the rest of the time. Because there are many cheaper alternatives to some gold obsessed yellow journalist, I'm afraid your services to the new magical empire that is being set up is terminated effective immediately."

"So you're going to kill me for just doing my job," challenged Rita.

"No, I'm not going to kill you but I will put you in a perilous situation that your life is endangered and stick around long enough to make sure you do in fact die," responded Lily as she looked at Rita, who attempted to move towards her wand but suddenly she found her legs unable to move.

"People will know something's up when I don't come back out of there," responded Rita, in an attempt to make her see reason but Lily just responded with a snicker, before she snapped her fingers and Tonks had transformed her features to an identical copy of Rita Skeeter.

"I don't think that will be much of a problem, Rita for the short term and for the long term, I'm sure a feasible explanation can be invented in the future, but there are bigger things to do today," said Lily as she

transfigured Rita into her Animagus form and then sealed her in a jar, with an unbreakable charm. "That should hold, I'll place you in a spare Gringotts vault, until I have more time to figure out what to do with you."

"I better get out there, so no one is suspicious about what's happening," offered Tonks and Lily responded with a nod.

"You did great, Harry and Ginny will both be pleased, along with many others, I'm sure that this pest's return was short lived," said Lily as she allowed Tonks to walk out into the bar to maintain the illusion that nothing out of the ordinary had occurred. Without another word, Lily stuffed the jar containing the beetle into a bag and headed back to Gringotts. The grand reopening would occur momentarily and she did not want to miss one second.

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A vast crowd gathered right in front of a podium area, with a large stage and several chairs, that were began to filled in with people with hoods pulled over their heads one at a time. The magical timer above the bank indicated there were fourteen minutes and twelve seconds until Gringotts was reopened and people leaned forward, they could not wait until the bank was opening up.

From the shadows of Knockturn Alley, another group watched from afar. The remnants of Voldemort's Death Eaters watched with irritation. This was supposed to be the Dark Lord's glorious moment, taking Gringotts for his own and now Potter ruined it. They would allow the Order of the Phoenix and the Council be cannon fodder for their real objective. Capturing Potter and forcing him to resurrect Lord Voldemort. Granted, that had been tried once before, unsuccessfully, but those Death Eaters were inept and rushed into an attack without a plan. These one's vowed to use others as a diversion to carry out their plans. There would be no way they could fail. None at all, but there forced allies had not shown up yet and the hooded figure was absent as well.

“Where are they, we’re supposed to storm the stage with seven minutes and second seconds, that’s coming up really soon,” hissed one of the Death Eaters.

“Leave it to blood traitors not to be punctual,” responded another Death Eater.

“Who are calling blood traitors, you were the one’s who followed a sad product of a squib and a Muggle,” stated a representative of the Council who had shown up immediately at that moment. “We’re actually trying to promote pureblood values, while your Dark Lord only tried to drag them down even further than they were.”

“Listen here, you’re treading a fine line,” said a Death Eater in a threatening voice, which caused the members of the Council to back off in fear, at just a couple of sparks. “I don’t know why that hooded bloke thought you ponces would be any good, you’re no good in a fight.”

“We’ve gotten the best tutoring of dueling etiquette imaginable, we can handle it,” stated one of the members of the Council in a pleased voice, which just caused a great deal of amusement from the Death Eaters.

“Tutoring won’t beat Potter, attacking him viciously and anyone who helps him without remorse will,” said the lead Death Eater, rolling his eyes. These people learned nothing, from the number of Death Eaters that Potter had put out of commission and suddenly, several more loud pops echoed the arrival of the members of the Order of the Phoenix who took a few steps forward, hands on their wands, ready to go. “And you people, must you announce when you arrive. It is going to tip Potter off that something is up.”

“Why would have a reason to look down Knockturn Alley?” asked one of the members of the Order but the Death Eater just responded with a disgusted glare, as the Order members craned their necks, wands ready. “There he is, let’s get him now.”

“No, we jump him at seven minutes and seven seconds until the opening, when the signal is given,” stated the Death Eater but he watched Harry Potter walk to the podium, with a small group that included his blood traitor girlfriend. Potter looked smug, as if nothing could touch him. “You won’t win Potter, not this time, not ever again.”

“Brace yourselves ladies and gentlemen, the clock is ticking down, only about a minute more,” said a Council representative, as if bracing himself to do something disturbing. Violence was something they tried to avoid, well directly that was. There were times where they had to employ magical assassins to take care of problems.

“And not a second before the signal,” cautioned a Death Eater again, which caused several Order members to have their eyes rolled and some mocking mutterings but they chose to ignore them. Harry stood, right next to his girlfriend as they exchanged a kiss, before they parted. “Hoped you enjoyed that Potter, because it will be the last time you touch her foul blood traitor lips.”

The seconds ticked down as Harry approached the podium, making sure the magical protections around the crowd were in place that would automatically rise up when an attack occurred. He turned as the clock ticked down with seven minutes and nineteen seconds left until the opening, seven minutes and eighteen seconds left until the opening, seven minutes and seventeen seconds until the opening of Gringotts, and so on. As the seconds ticked down, Harry yawned with seven minutes and eight seconds left.

Suddenly a blast came from behind Harry. Several people screamed and Harry dove down, a hole blasted right in the stage, as people attempted to scatter.

From Knockturn Alley, the group moved forward. That was the signal. The Order of the Phoenix rushed headlong into the battle, throwing stunning spells in every direction to get Potter but several cloaked figures moved in, blocking the attacks from the Order of the Phoenix members. They were caught off guard by this unexpected resistance and the stunning spells were easily deflected. The Death Eaters moved in, throwing any dark spells they could, including a few Killing

Curses. None of them could see Potter the second he dove down but there was a shield placed over the panicking crowd and it took several seconds to realize that they were safe and secure from the attack, as this group, Potter's security from the looks of it, had been battling these witches and wizards who had recklessly attacked what was supposed to be a peaceful outing for the day.

"Hang on, we're going to get them!" shouted one of the council representatives as several ropes were shot out. They were not going to kill anyone except for Potter, but they had to secure his security until they had secured Potter. Unfortunately, their ropes were cut and one of the council members was attacked from behind, as both of his kneecaps shattered from the impact of the spell hitting from behind. The Council representatives were not used to fighting a straight up battle and they fell. One of them were disarmed in a very painful way, as their hand was broken by a spell, causing their wand to be dropped, before their arms and legs roughly snapped together in a full body bind. Two more Council members walked over, before there were several spells bounced right into the chests of the Council Members.

"Everyone back off, the protections might hold, but we're not taking any chances!" shouted Ginny as the Death Eaters stepped towards her.

"Let's capture his girlfriend, he'll come after here and then we'll have him," remarked one of the Death Eaters but he was blasted full force with a curse by Ginny, the second that he tried to step forward. Two more Death Eaters were dropped before Neville and Luna stepped in, to help Ginny fight them off. A Killing Curse was aimed improperly, only striking the side of the bank and doing no harm to anyone. Ropes wrapped around the Death Eater and he dropped to the ground. They were tight, so tight that he could only breath enough to live. Doing more than that was something that would be discouraged.

"A group of Death Eaters went over there," said Luna, but another team of D.A. members were swarming in already. There were only three Death Eaters and despite their desperation attacks in throwing two Killing Curses, their aim was off and thus they dropped to the

ground, unconscious with a few broken bones but no fatal injuries as was the plan.

“Maybe we should fall back,” said one of the Council members as all but three or four Death Eaters had fallen and most of the Order as well, except for a few. This was not going there way and there hooded friend had only shown up to give the signal. Potter had stayed out of the way mostly.

“We can’t, we have to find Potter, or we might never get another chance,” said an Order member hotly but a stunning spell had taken him out before he could even utter another thought. He dropped to the ground, knocked unconscious and not moving for even a second. Several looks were exchanged by the remaining members and despite the fact there were still some sounds of fighting, it had died down.

“Did we ever have a chance?” asked one of the Council Members skeptically. “It seems like that hooded figure might have sold us down the river.”

He was struck in the back by an attack from Lily, who dodged an assault, feeble and weak, before she fired back with an attack. She hated to hold back on her attacks, but there was a point to be proven here. Besides, these people would suffer soon enough for what they did. A couple of Death Eaters tried to scramble but they were disarmed and then detained.

They laid on the ground, struggling to escape the binds they were put in but without their wands, they were useless. The crowd, at least those people who had not been paralyzed with fear,” jeered madly, upset at the attacks as Harry raised up over the stage, as the members of the Pureblood Council of Warlocks for Magical Traditions stood, as several figures held their wands at them. It was obvious that the Order of the Phoenix and the Death Eaters or whatever was left of them, had been incapacitated and thus they were alone after a short, but intense fight. It was about as brutal as it could be without excessive brutality and blood shed. Harry glared a hole through them, almost disgusted.

“Ladies and Gentlemen, I present to you the Pureblood Council of Warlocks for Magical Tradition,” said Harry in a sarcastic tone of voice as he looked at them. “A group who, if I’m not mistaken, distances themselves from the barbaric practices of attacking a highly populated gathering, a peaceful gathering I might add, and trying to further some type of agenda. They say they stand for maintaining magical tradition, but what kind of tradition is it to stage an attack on such a joyous occasion.”

The crowd booed and hissed, pointing at the council, while many tried to maintain some semblance of dignity but even they had their share of harsh looks to throw in their direction.

“They came into the Wizengamot not too long ago, demanding they would have power handed to them so they could prevent the traditions of the Wizarding World from dying out, outdated traditions mind you, but they wanted to keep them in place because they were unwilling to adapt to change” added Harry in a sharp voice. “Exactly the same things we should be moving beyond.”

“The same traditions that caused so many of your friends and family to be caught in the crossfire by Lord Voldemort,” remarked Ginny, as she exchanged look with Harry, the crowd obviously enraged at what the council tried to do. “Do you want a broken world that caused someone like that to rise to remain intact? Do you want your children, your grandchildren, your great grand children, and many more generations to come relive the nightmare of a dark uprising like Lord Voldemort over and over again? Do you wish for that to happen? It’s happened because of keeping outdated traditions and practices in place and will happen again. Today this Council tried to sabotage us, to try and maintain tradition, obviously trying to stir up sentiment against us, but did who put you in danger and who protected you at all costs?”

There was a great deal of hatred directed towards the Council and the D.A. Leaders moved in close to them, with several other senior members holding their wands firmly and with the Council members

disarmed, they had no choice but stand here and face whatever they had.

“So, you attacked me today, in front of a populated area full of innocent bystanders and you thought you could get away with it,” said Harry. “Exactly why might I ask you?”

“Well its nothing personal Mr. Potter it's just that we feel you're disruptive towards our magical values, with a little education, you could be an asset to our cause,” said one of the members of the Council. “To promote the values before our world stagnates into Muggle influenced...”

“If by education you mean turning me into a mindless drone, then perhaps I could be a valuable cause, but one thing you must realize is Harry Potter is no one's puppet and Harry Potter sure as hell isn't no one's pawn,” said Harry in a low voice, that only the Council Members could hear. “They want to use me as a tool to force me to maintain their values to put you all in danger but I think I should allow the people to decide. Are these the type of people who you want leading you into this post-Voldemort future?”

The crowd was very negative about this possibility and some had even called for their heads. The council members looked absolutely mortified at these horrible suggestions, some of them wondering what kind of civilized people could suggest such things.

“Sure Mr. Potter, with all due respect, anyone can make puppets dance on strings in moments of high emotion but when cooler heads and sanity prevails...” stated one of the Council members but Harry interjected in, he just loved when foolish people had handed him weapons to deliberately bludgeon their reputations with.

“So you see how this council who claims to be out for the best interest of the citizens of this and many other magical governments see you as, puppets on strings, that can be manipulated, they want to control what you are capable of, control the potential of the government of this company, and keep everything the way it was, is that fair?” asked Harry and there were louder sounds of disapproval

yet, some of the spells bouncing off of the magical shields that Harry had placed up. Right now, his prisoners should be very thankful they had put them up but the crowd was doing their best to test how durable those protections are. “No, I thought not, I really thought not, given the fact that you somehow roped some Z-Level Death Eaters and the last members of the Order of the Phoenix into your scheme, you still couldn’t get the job done.”

“We weren’t behind this, it was that hooded guy, it was a set up, we were going to discredit you politically,” responded one of the Council members as the others nodded their heads, but the D.A. just responded with laughter and several crowd members forgot their momentary rage to snicker at the utter absurdity of the matter.

“Don’t try and double talk me, it won’t work, now I believe I hand things over to those skilled, Wizengamot Approved Aurors, that will be escorting them to a nice containment cell where they can think about what they did, until justice could be administered,” said Harry and a group of Aurors did as Harry indicated, rounding up the Council members, the Death Eaters, and the members of the Order, stunning those who remained awake. As he watched them being carried away, Harry turned to the crowd. “Now with that mess out of the way, we do have a bank to open so let me remove these barriers, open the doors, and we can get back to living our lives to show those who would try and do us harm that we aren’t scared off easily.”

That got a very joyous reaction as the people filed in the bank, as the new bank employees waited to do business, slightly different then what the goblins done, but they were much friendlier, less surly, and much more helpful. The D.A. Leaders, along with Lily remained outside the bank.

“Harry, you can be a magnificent bastard sometimes,” said Neville in an awed voice.

“No, he’s something much better, a brilliant politician,” remarked Ginny as she kissed Harry in celebration.

“Just step one, the final step, tonight, I trust the Daily Prophet will understand what needs to be reported to inform the people of what happened and how well the crowd was protected,” said Harry. “True most of them were here but...”

“In other countries that they are still established, they will be discredited and people in those governments will wonder about how much they are controlling them and how much progression they were allowed,” said Susan.

“Leaving us open for furthering our plans over there,” said Daphne.

“Precisely, an empire starts with one step on a long journey, but most of the cancers in this country have been eliminated, Dumbledore, Voldemort, corrupt Ministry officials, disruptive journalists, the goblins, and the Hogwarts house system,” remarked Lily.

“It will be done, the world goes beyond today, but now it’s been proven who has the best interests of the country in mind,” said Harry. “Now, I think this would be the perfect time to oversee the results of our hard effort with Gringotts.”

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In a dark holding facility, out in the countryside, several figures stirred. They attempted to move but they were unable to. Much to their horror, their sleeves had been sewed shut and they had been stuck to the wall by the robes with a permanent sticking spell. That charm was only intended to work with inanimate objects, but obviously whoever secured them here. Several of the Death Eaters cursed and the other prisoners were not far behind.

“You got yourselves captured,” remarked a calm voice as they looked up, to barely make out the image of the same hooded figure. “As I had assumed you would.”

“YOU!” shouted one of the prisoners.

“I thought you wanted Potter done,” stated another prisoner but the hooded figure stood, looking at his gloved hands, a rather bored expression underneath the hood.

“Did I say that?” asked the prisoner. “Perhaps I might have given you that impression by certain phrases used in my speech, but if you read between the lines, I said I was the only person who could beat Potter and that the right result would be guaranteed. Which is what happened, I always succeed, failure is never an option with me...I should take this hood off so I can properly see the looks on your faces.”

The hood pulled down to reveal the face of one Harry James Potter.

“Potter, you tried to recruit us to eliminate you?” asked one of the Order members. “That doesn’t make any sense!”

“Actually it does, it was a trap, he tricked us,” said one of the Council members in a horrified voice as Harry just started clapping slowly and loudly, not blinking as he looked down. His face had an indifferent look beyond that, it was rather unnerving.

“So decided to come here and execute us when we can’t defend ourselves,” challenged one of the Death Eaters.

“Please, don’t be some dramatic, I won’t kill you, rather time will do that trick for me,” said Harry. “This prison is placed under the Fidelius Charm as of a few minutes ago. I think I don’t have to tell you who the Secret Keeper is. Here the rules of the game. This holding facility is so secure it would take a miracle and several really powerful witches and wizards to break out. You my friends will be fastened to the wall. I will activate a charm that will separate you into miniature cells that only have just enough room for you inside with no food, water, sunlight, or sound. You can scream as loud as you want but even you wouldn’t be able to hear yourself. If you want to try and break out, knock yourself out, but those permanent sticking charms I fastened you to the wall by will take care of any movements and without your wands, you’re nothing.”

“Don’t we get a trial?” asked one of the Order members desperately.

“You could have chosen not to take part in this plot to eliminate me, but you failed to do so and thus you were judged guilty for putting an entire crowd of people in jeopardy,” said Harry.

“But you didn’t give us any chance to back out,” said another prisoner.

“Yes, one would think this might be a no win situation, but what about the letter that you were sent? Did I drag you out of the house at wand point and force you to come?” asked Harry, still not blinking and still staring back at them. “No, thought not, you had a choice. I’m all about offering people opportunities but they have to take responsibility for their actions and their failures. If I was captured, killed, or somehow disgraced, I would deserve what I got but that won’t be happening. Now it’s time I bid you goodbye forever. I hope there is someone on the other side, in the alleged next great adventure that has more mercy than I do, because mine has run out.”

Harry paused, holding his wand to activate the charms but for a brief fleeting second, some of the prisoners had held out hope that he was not going to implement this barbaric manner of allowing to perish slowly and rather painfully.

“As your minds snap from what is about to occur, ponder this,” said Harry in a soft voice. “How could you assume that you would ever eliminate someone who had eliminated Voldemort once and for all? Someone who does not lose? Now if you excuse me I have a Wizengamot investigation to kick off and a Ministry to get back running so we can move on. In the end, you should understand if anything else, there is nothing that I won’t do to protect the interests of my people. Thank you for making this much easier on us all and bless your pathetic efforts.”

With that the charms were put up and Harry was gone.

The second to last chapter is done and that came out slightly different than I intended. It was a case of having one idea up in my head but it turned in a slightly different direction. It reached the same end result but the path to get there was somewhat different if it made sense.

Harry is just a bit sadistic but it's easy to see which side of the family he gets it from. Truth was he did do many things that put the world in a better place than it was before and during Voldemort's rise to power, even if his measures tended to be a bit much.

As we move to the next and final chapter, this chapter was the hardest to write for many reasons I think. Just one more chapter, a few more thousand words, and I can step back and take a breather. At least that's the theory. No idea had popped in my head for a future story that's a clear cut choice that I need to start writing straight away. As for this story, I'm about out of gas, so that's why it has to end. Perhaps in hindsight I should have cut off the story after the final confrontation with Voldemort, as that was the high water mark as far as fight scenes go. Still, I felt like to properly wrap up the story the way I wanted it to go, I had to write these final five chapters, even though I was not as thrilled with them as I was the previous fifty but such is life. :)

Anyway, the story is about ended. Many of the plot lines I had in place from the start finished as plan. Some got skewed along the way, ending up differently then the plan because of how the writing took me, for better or for worse. A couple got dropped completely, but they were not vital anyway. One shorter chapter and we can call it a day. I would like to thank everyone for reading and all the reviews. I say you should live to entertain yourself first with the readers slightly behind, because otherwise there would be no story, but damned if it's not appreciated.

Okay, I've rambled enough. See you again soon for the final chapter and maybe more stories in the not so distant future.

Chapter Fifty Five: Finale

September First approached quickly. Much like the grand reopening of Gringotts, the first year of Hogwarts in the new era was a landmark occasion. The first year that students would not be placed in one of the four houses, where they would be labeled by what the traits were for that house for the rest of their life, that they would not limit the friends they would make. While more than a few stepped outside the boundaries of their houses to make friends, the truth was that the vast majority did not. Now there would be no problem. People would be judged on who they were, rather than what house they were in. It was the next step towards the brand new era that had been slowly taking shape around the world. The Great Hall was buzzing, some a bit uneasy, as the four House tables were no longer in place, replaced by two larger tables, in addition to the Head table. This pretty much forced the issue that former Gryffindors, Slytherins, Ravensclaws, and Hufflepuffs would have to sit together. People who were in the former Gryffindor and Slytherin houses gave each other uneasy looks as they felt themselves sitting in close proximity with each other. Some wondered what Potter was thinking. They would try to make this work but for the Slytherins, this would never work because of the Gryffindors. For the Gryffindors, this would never work because of the Slytherins.

Outside of the Great Hall, Harry and Ginny stood outside, enjoying a few moments today, before Harry had to enter the Great Hall. The country wide investigations were nearly reaching completion, thanks to the tireless work of everyone involved with them. Several potential problems were discovered and were dealt with accordingly. It was alarming how many people had views that were contrary to the steps forward that needed to be taken and how many were content with the things were. However, there was a silver lining to the issue, as there was a decent amount of people who were optimistic about changes being made. They just never thought it would happen and Harry could hardly fault them for that. S

The Ministry of Magic was nearly ready to be reestablished, after several of the outdated and quite frankly ridiculous laws were thrown out. They would be replaced by newer laws that would govern the Wizarding World more appropriately. As for the matter of declaring a

new Minister of Magic, that was a bridge they would cross when the time came. Harry thought he would have it decided by a democratic election which he was certain would be something that would make several purebloods spin in their graves. Of course, he also was in full realization that any candidate he endorsed would win the Minister of Magic spot in a landslide. At this point, if he said dragon dung was high in fiber, several people would be changing their diets.

“So it’s almost time,” said Ginny, break the silence as she looked at Harry. “Just one more step to everything.”

“I know, it just seems odd that almost three years ago, I was a naïve kid who blindly trusted everyone now...” stated Harry.

“You have pretty much every witch and wizard in the palm of your hand?” suggested Ginny and Harry responded a nod. “Well you worked hard, harder than anyone else would have in your position and now that hard work is going to pay off. I don’t think there is a day that has gone by in the last month where the Daily Prophet has not talked about some reform that you had personally arranged to better the Wizarding World.”

“Well to be fair, Mum made sure that they wrote about the positives, I’m sure if people dug deep enough, they might find something to complain about, but those reporters may have to retire just like Rita Skeeter did,” said Harry as he exchanged a knowing smile with Ginny. “I’m just glad most of the hard work is done. Most but not all, but our little demonstration in Diagon Alley really opened up a few eyes I think...”

“Yes, dissent has been down since that time in Diagon Alley,” remarked Ginny as she stood close to Harry. “A few complaints, but really, those people will always complain and do nothing more than just complain. It’s not like anyone will take their ranting seriously some of these people that were complaining.”

“There will be people who complain and be a disruptive influence, it’s just a matter of determining who is a serious threat and who is just blowing hot air out of their mouth,” said Harry seriously. “I’m glad

these investigations are other and we see where everyone stands. That will make our lives a lot easier but it is not over.”

“No, I suppose not but what we’ve done so far, it’s helped change everything, even though we had to do some things that people might frown upon at best and be absolutely appalled by at worst, but it was all necessary, nothing more, nothing less,” said Ginny, as she leaned forward and kissed Harry. Harry held her tight, as they gazed in each other’s eyes. They could do this forever and would have plenty of time to do so, once everything settled down. There were many capable hands in place to carry their share of the slack, so Harry and Ginny could have some breathing room. Still they would have the final say and their opinions would take high priority over most everything. Ginny slowly broke apart, from Harry. “Next year, which means fresh blood that could join the Defense Association and they can learn from the best.”

“Yes, they will always be my elite force, the Ministry Aurors are the official force in maintaining the peace, but I enjoy having a group that can work from the shadows, enforcing things, because the restrictions for Aurors are going to remain strict, because it is a tough job,” admitted Harry as he remembered the restrictions, one of the few things that the old guard had gotten right. There were only a couple of changes to be made but other than that everything was kept in place. “I would never want to be one.”

“And you never have to be one, with all of the people who are holding up the fight,” said Ginny. “I believe your speech is coming up in a few minutes, so the sooner you can get out there, the sooner the feast can be start and the sooner the feast starts, the sooner we can spend even more time alone.”

“You make a very compelling argument, Ginny,” said Harry as he walked out, thinking about how they would be married soon enough, but it was the matter of waiting for the right time for everything to settle down. As Chief Warlock of the Wizengamot, Harry had the power to marry them at any time with Ginny’s consent, but it was not quite time. Perhaps in a few months time but right now it was just the matter of making it official. In their minds, they already were.” I’ll see

you in a little bit then, the rest of the D.A. looks ready, I think Luna secured you a seat as well.”

Ginny nodded, before they exchanged an all too brief case, as Harry turned to walk out one door, where Ginny walked the other way, to sit right beside Luna, with an empty seat awaiting Harry from when he got there. He looked outside into the Great Hall, standing beside the table, seeing McGonagall give the usual speech. Quidditch tryouts would happen soon, the Forbidden Forest was in fact Forbidden. Filch had forbidden a lot of items as well and magic was not allowed in the hallways. The only thing that was not dealt with was the new and improved point system, now that the houses were abolished. That would be something that Harry would deal with in a matter of moments. He watched as McGonagall wrapped up the speech and turned to Harry.

“Now while some traditions remain in place at Hogwarts, others have been decided to be outdated and there will be many changes this year for you returning students, I trust that there will be a long process adjusting, but I hope that you do Hogwarts proud and do your best to help the transition process go as smoothly as possible,” concluded McGonagall as she turned slightly, as she watched Harry walk towards the table. “I’m sure this individual will tell you about this new process in running Hogwarts and the changes that will begin to take place this year. The Defensive Magic Teacher and the Hogwarts High Inquisitor, Professor Harry Potter.”

There were a loud round of cheers, mostly coming from the Defense Association but the reception from other parts of the school were also loud. A few people sat, with sour, disgusted looks on their face, but slowly began to clap, not to be singled out and being branded as outcasts. The teachers clapped respectively as Harry stood there. He waited for the applause and the noise in the Great Hall to die down but it took some time. More time than he could imagined. It was the type of reaction that one would respect for the defeater of Lord Voldemort and the person who saved the Wizarding World from utter ruin by taking control of Gringotts. As far as Harry knew, many people had long since stopped thinking about exactly how that was accomplished and that was perfectly fine with him. The applause

continued for some time and it was a rather slow process that died down over a period of many minutes.

Once the Great Hall had gone mostly silent, Harry took a deep breath as he looked out at all of the faces, many of them intrigued with what he had to say.

“Thank you all and welcome to another year at Hogwarts,” responded Harry with a pause. “Now, I’ll try to make this as brief as possible, as I know some of you are hungry and want to get down to eating.”

The students of Hogwarts laughed at that one and even some of the teachers smiled, before Harry continued his speech.

“Now we begin a new year at Hogwarts, in more ways than one, I see many new faces here and I welcome you, I hope the next seven years are filled with nothing but memorable experiences, as you are the first batch of individuals to begin their education in this new Wizarding World,” responded Harry. “And the world has changed for the better, the defeat of Lord Voldemort and his Death Eaters being disbanded has allowed us to step out into the light. There may be steps that are yet to be taken, but right now the worst has happened. Things can only improve from that dark time and improve we will, starting right here at Hogwarts.”

Harry paused, mostly to give him some time to collect a few last second thoughts but also to give everyone a chance to take in what he said.

“As you no doubt know by now, the former Hogwarts house system is gone, I heard the Sorting Hat was particularly pleased with that, he can finally enjoy a nice overdue retirement, a thousand years of sorting eleven year olds can get on your nerves after a time,” remarked Harry in an off handed voice. “Nevertheless, there was a consensus that the Hogwarts House System, while it worked for years, no longer worked and made things worse. Tensions were high, especially due to a senseless feud between two certain houses who will remain nameless. Yes, I admit, when I was younger and more

naïve, I took part in that feud. That was in the past and while our mistakes from the past should be remembered, we should also attempt to move on. And moving on we will. None of you are Hufflepuffs. None of you are Ravenclaws. None of you are Gryffindors and none of you are Slytherins. No matter where you were formally placed, a year ago, two years ago, or whenever, you're one thing and I want you to remember this. The peace will be kept in the school, regardless of your former house affiliations. I can see some uneasy looks as you're placed in close proximity to certain students. That's done and I encourage you to move on. Old wounds may heal slowly, but it's something that has to be done for us to fully grow as a society. With a little maturity and a little tolerance of individuals with different backgrounds and opinions then us, it will be a smooth transition. Should you make it hard, well you're only doing yourself a disservice."

Harry paused, as many people clapped, some rather forced. The Defense Association Army lead the charge, clapping the loudest and their cheers echoed throughout the Great Hall. Still he hoped people would heed his words, there would be some consequences for those who had tried to stir up trouble due to past house affiliations.

"That brings us to the new and improved house point system," stated Harry calmly. "Now I'm sure Professor McGonagall has already told you about the Quidditch teams this year, where you're going to play for fun, rather than for the glory of your houses. I hope when the teams are made up, there are a variety of students from each team. Otherwise, we may have to revoke the privileges of people who try and make this an issue of their former houses and shun people from playing. But that's another matter entirely, right now the house point system. I felt it should be kept into place for another year or so to see what happens, but it may be abolished all together. You will be awarded points individually and those with a certain amount of points get certain benefits. It is still being ironed out as we speak, but additional trips to Hogsmeade are arranged for those who have a certain number of points. Those who lose all of their points will lose the privilege of going to Hogsmeade at all."

That was not a popular announcement but there was little more that could be done but grumbling.

“You gain points by showing unity to this new system and helping make it a smooth transition, you lose points for the usual misbehavior issues but more points can be lost by treating others unfairly because of what they are,” said Harry calmly. “The new rules about using certain words to describe people of Muggleborn descent apply and the same also applies for calling people evil just because they were in a certain house in the past. If I, any of the prefects, or the teachers here it, there will be punishments given and points taken away. You all start with two hundred and fifty points, whether you keep them steady, expand them, or lose them is up to you. Only you can choose to move forward or be left in a past that has proven to not work. If you have any concerns or suggestions, my office door is always open but do think carefully. If it is any complaints about the house system being abolished, I will not be very patient in hearing you out.”

Harry gave a look that quite plainly said “things have changed, my allies and I are in control, deal with it” but most of the people in the Great Hall waited for any further words. Whether it was because they liked Harry or not was irrelevant, the fact was they were listening.

“One final thing and I’ll let you eat the wonderful food prepared for this opening feast, first years will have an orientation tomorrow morning in the Great Hall after Breakfast, where all of their questions will be answered and maps of the school will be given out, I think we can all agree that was something we all wished we could have in the past, given how lost we were in these first few weeks,” said Harry and there was laughter by several people. They did agree, having a map would save them a lot of grief. “Well that’s it for me. With Voldemort done, the world can change and the changes will happen. Many more adventures may wait in the future, but those are bridges we will cross when the time has come. Until then, I wish you all the best of luck. Enjoy the feast. Thank you.”

The End

Well that’s all folks. The end has come. Of course we know who Harry was really talking to in those last few sentences. :)

Well Harry, I intended for him to get a little caught up in the power always, Ginny as well. Still, they both believe what they are doing is for everyone's own good. Which technically is a mark of many good villains, they believe their actions are justified, no matter what. Still they were heroes to many and villains to some. You could make a similar argument for Voldemort as well, but to a lesser extent.

Voldemort, I mentioned I thought the story was pretty much over with him the last chapter and thus these last five chapters lacked something. I still feel I was right. He was the only person who could give Harry a challenge and with Voldemort, the challenge is pretty much gone. Until someone new rises up in fifteen or twenty years or whatever, Harry and Ginny will run things (mostly from the shadows, but their influence will be felt), pretty much unchallenged. Of course, that's just my theory on what the next stage of evolution would be.

In a way, these final five chapters could be considered an extremely extended epilogue and that makes me feel better about their purpose in that way. Your perspective may vary.

As for any sequels, highly unlikely, but never say never. Still, don't hold your breath. Really, don't hold your breath. It's not good for you. As for future projects of mine, well, it will be a bit. Maybe after a few weeks I'll really want to write but right now, I'm ready for a nice overdue break.

Okay that's it. Seriously, I'm done writing this story. I mean it, scram you pesky kids. Get off my lawn before I call the cops. :)